

# Designing and Using Berms

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A berm is a mound of earth or a raised area in the landscape.

## Functional Aspects

- Direct drainage
- Direct traffic
- Screen views
- Accent views
- Create a noise barrier
- Create a private enclosure
- Add relief to a flat landscape
- Provide an elevated growing area in a wet area to better insure the survival of the plant material
- Provide more garden space
- Create a island planting
- Create a rain garden

## Size:

- Depends on the scale of the yard
  - Berms can be over powering if they are out of scale with the yard
  - Scale is visual and may mean different thing to different people
- Depends on the purpose
- For every foot of height, 4-5 feet of width is need.
- Berms that are out of proportion of height to width such as 6 feet wide 4 to 6 feet tall:
  - Look out of proportion
  - Are not natural looking
  - Look like grave mounds
  - The height out of the ground can add stress to the plants since it gets very dry quicker and the plants are more subject to the weather
  - Hard to keep a mulch a steep berms

## Shapes

- The shape of the berm should enhance and blend in with the design of the landscape
- Shapes can be
  - Symmetrical
    - Easier to work with and easier to visually balance
  - Asymmetrical

- Shapes:
  - Ovals
  - Kidney Bean
  - Linear
  - L-shaped
  - Circular
  - Free from
  - Etcetera
- The topography can be undulating. A uniform mound is not needed

#### Rocks

- Used to provide a retaining wall for the steep side
- Used to provide levels within the berm
- Used as accents in the berm

#### Plant material

- Almost any type of plant material can be incorporated in to the berm
- Try to repeat (repetition) material used in other areas of the yard. Especially areas that are visually connected to the berm
- Echo colors and shapes from areas visually connected to the berm
- If the berms are functional as screens use evergreen woody material as the bones of the design, in combination with deciduous and herbaceous material.
- Use perennial material in masses
- Massing of plant material may have a better effect than intricate designs for berms set a distance from the house.

#### Miscellaneous

- Make sure the berm is an intricate part of the landscape. The visual effect should be bermlandscaped not berm....landscape
- Avoid over planting
- Avoid having berms from becoming a collection of odds and ends material
- Avoid tall high berms often called grave mounds
- Many times berms are created near lot lines and near the front of the yard. Beware of set backs. Many times the front 20 feet of your front yard is not your twenty feet
- Berms are a good place to use the spoils from other projects in the yard.