

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Dreaming up your perfect landscape
- » Assessing your current landscape's needs and potential
- » Thinking about your property differently

Chapter **1**

Designing Your Landscape: The Birth of Your Design

Just envision it: You walk out your back door to a beautiful, comfortable oasis. Transforming your yard isn't only totally doable, but the process is also rewarding and yes, fun. The new look begins with new thinking: figuring out what you want most, finding inspiring ideas, and dovetailing those dreams with practical considerations.

Your new, improved landscape should be a place you and those you live with genuinely enjoy and use. The *hardscape* (the parts of your landscape that are physically hard, like a deck or fence) can create an outdoor room for relaxing as well as for entertaining from time to time. The plants can provide bright color, privacy, sunblock, or minimal maintenance — whatever you're looking for. The idea is to make it *yours*, personalized the way you like it. It will become your outdoor home, practical *and* pretty.

Here we encourage you to think what's possible. You can cross the bridge between dreaming and reality. We show you how in this chapter.

Starting with Dreams — Create Your Wish List

A landscape can be whatever suits you. Experienced landscape designers often say something like “Form follows function,” which simply means that a landscape should meet the needs of the people who use it. In other words, you can design the most elaborate landscape with thousands of dollars’ worth of beautiful plants and expensive paving, but if you can’t find a comfortable place to set up the barbeque and you *love* to grill, what good is such a yard to you?

The place to start, really, is with a wish list. Here are some possibilities to jog your thinking. Do make your own list and tinker with it. This process is your time to be creative, so have fun:

- » Create a sanctuary for pollinators, butterflies, and/or birds.
- » Grow and harvest fresh herbs for cooking.
- » Create low-maintenance flowerbeds.
- » Raise food for your family.
- » Make a space that’s private and shielded from noise and distractions.
- » Work with color ideas to make some really beautiful displays.
- » Play catch (or fetch) on the lawn (with your kids or dog).
- » Cut fresh flower bouquets.
- » Reduce water bills and maintenance costs.
- » Entertain guests in comfort and style.
- » Sip adult beverages while lounging around a firepit.
- » Create a shady retreat.
- » Garden in harmony with nature.
- » Enclose your yard in living plants rather than fencing.
- » Grow vegetables and fruit for canning.
- » Swing in a hammock with a good book (or take a nap).
- » Replace dull foundation plantings.
- » Play sports such as volleyball, badminton, croquet, or flag football.
- » Add a lot more color, especially in nonpeak times.

- » Enjoy the garden after the sun goes down.
- » Erect a buffer between you and neighboring properties.
- » Swim in a pool or soak in a spa.
- » Admire fish and waterlilies in a small pond.
- » Supervise kids in a sand box, play structure, or fort.
- » Make a small garden seem bigger or more interesting.
- » Compost lawn clippings, raked leaves, and kitchen scraps.
- » View colorful flowers or container plants.
- » Grow gorgeous roses.
- » Grow scented flowers and fragrant herbs.
- » Make an attractive yard that stands out in your neighborhood.
- » Create a meadow of wildflowers.
- » Cook and serve meals outdoors.
- » Relax in the shade created by a vine-covered pergola.
- » Install a gazebo and make a path out to it.
- » Make a resilient landscape, one that can tolerate challenging weather.
- » Hold barbecue parties or potluck dinners.

After the brainstorming and wish-listing, an important part of this process is looking at what you have with new eyes. Sure, you may have some limitations and parameters, but even you can rethink or work them to your advantage. New possibilities will emerge. As you proceed, your dreams and goals will come into clearer focus.

Gathering good ideas

Collecting new-to-you and fresh, inspirational ideas for your landscape design is in many ways a treasure hunt. The following sections can spur your inspiration.

Plan weekend outings to nurseries

Plants are often displayed at nurseries according to their needs for sun or shade. For example, ferns are displayed in a shade house, whereas daylilies are displayed in full sun. After a visit or two, you can figure out which plants you like and start imagining where to plant them.

Some nurseries offer lectures or demos on weekends, which are usually free and are valuable for gathering information on plants and gardening.

Visit local botanical gardens and arboretums

Check out the labels and interpretative signage. Some of the plants may be unusual, but more than likely they're proven in your climate. Find out, too, if the venue is hosting speakers or holding workshops. If so, sign up and attend. Such events are often free or inexpensive, giving you the opportunity to learn while meeting other gardeners.

Join a garden club or plant society

These groups frequently have informative speakers at their meetings and periodically offer garden tours. Garden tours are great because they offer you the opportunity to observe the use of various landscape elements, both hardscape and plants. Your local nursery should be able to hook you up with garden clubs or societies dedicated to specific plants, like the Rose Society or Rhododendron Society.

Tour your neighbors' yards

Ask people how they did what they did. You may find that even normally reserved or private people love to talk about their yard. Also, seeing the level of landscaping in your neighborhood gives you a benchmark on the level and quality of landscaping that the neighborhood warrants.

Go online

Start with social media, such as Pinterest, Instagram, and Facebook. Search for "landscaping design ideas" and specific wishes to find many sites, blogs, and images.



TIP

In particular, pause at the websites of landscape designers, which tend to tout dreamy completed jobs, often with before-and-after images or progress shots. They can give you clues as to how planning and building can proceed. You'll also pick up on philosophies and techniques you can use.

Subscribe to garden magazines or trawl their websites

They can increase your warehouse of knowledge on plants and their uses.

Of course, after you subscribe or provide your email address, you soon receive every mail-order plant catalog in the country or are added to those email lists, which is great for you.

Create idea caches on your computer's desktop, or manually clip articles or images that interest you and make idea-board collages. Or make folders organized by plant type. Here are labels on some of the folders we keep: bulbs, perennials, annuals, evergreen trees and shrubs, deciduous trees and shrubs, vines, tools, lawns and groundcovers, bugs (both good and bad), plant diseases, decks and patios, garden paths, and garden furniture.

Magazines and catalogs can also alert you to problems in the care and maintenance of plants in the landscape. Magazines including *Garden Design*, *The English Garden*, *Gardens Illustrated*, and *Gardenista* are sources of inspiration geared more to design ideas, whereas *Fine Gardening*, *Horticulture*, *Garden Gate*, *Birds & Blooms*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, and *Sunset* offer lots of practical information on plants and planting.

Chat with a Master Gardener

Your closest Cooperative Extension office can put you in touch with a Master Gardener, or alert you to any event or gathering a group of them may be planning. Master Gardeners are knowledgeable about plants and gardening. They can answer your questions and point you to good resources, including their favorite suppliers in your area.

THINKING LONG TERM

How long you plan to live in your house influences your landscape planning. If you're only planning to live in your house a couple of years, concentrate on fast-growing trees and shrubs to give you a more powerful effect sooner. Expensive projects like a deck or gazebo may add to the value of your home, but you may not recoup those costs before you're ready to move.

In general, the shorter your stay, the less complex your landscape plans should be. If you plan to stay in your house for a long time, go ahead and tackle more difficult projects, such as adding a deck, fence, pool, or patio (see Part 2).

Are you or someone else in your home aging, or planning to stay and garden at this address until older? Is anyone, of any age, handicapped or mobility-challenged (regular visitors or residents)? Sooner or later, you and your landscape design may need to accommodate these specialized needs. Among the design ideas that facilitate such folks are: wider, flatter smoother paths providing access to different spots, elevated gardening beds, comfortable (shady) places to sit, and specialized maintenance tools. Among many great resources for ideas and advice is www.accessiblegardens.com.

Use this book

Flip to Part 2 of this book for information on building hardscape and Part 3 for ideas on plants. You can also check out the latest edition of *Gardening Basics For Dummies* by Steven Frowine and the Editors of the National Gardening Association (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

Drawing within the Lines: Living with Practical Issues

Some parts — only a few, don't fret — of working with your landscape are non-negotiable. Here we discuss them in greater detail, in case one or more applies to your situation. Although they may be necessary considerations, they don't need to derail your dreams. Just find ways to address them.

Making sure you know where your property lines are

Our advice here is quite blunt: Don't work near or on the bounds unless you know where the bounds are. By that, we mean, don't plan a change, or don't start up a new fence, hedge, or any landscaping project close to the edges of your property unless you know for certain where the legal lines are.



REMEMBER

You won't find your property lines drawn on the ground. If you're lucky, though, you may find *monuments*, or markers, at one or more property corners. These markers may be conspicuous posts driven into the ground, but more likely, they're small pipes, rebar, or brass medallions, often buried over time under soil. Property corners at the street are usually marked by small crosses inscribed in the concrete curb or gutter. If you can't find your markers easily, ask your immediate neighbors or long-time residents living nearby. As a good-neighbor policy, you may want to conduct the search with your immediate neighbors anyway, especially to clarify the ownership of fences.

Keep in mind that your actual property line may be set back several feet/a meter or so from its markers. Also check your deed to see whether the street occupies an easement along the front of your property (an *easement* essentially means that your city, county, or neighbors may use the space if ever needed).

When you can't verify your property lines, you need to hire a professional land surveyor (PLS); they can also provide seasoned advice about any disputes or ambiguities.



REMEMBER

Tax maps, sorry to report, are estimations and won't hold up in a legal dispute. Deeds have written descriptions, not so useful to you in this situation. If your deed references a recent survey map, that can be useful . . . you can trace it.

Verifying whether you need permits

If you're contemplating some new and substantial features or dramatic changes (a grade change or rerouting where water flows, for example), make sure you call your municipality permitting office to find out if a permit is required. New decks, patios, and water features are among the items that some municipalities regulate.



WARNING

Don't find out the hard way that you've planned, or worse, completed something that isn't allowed or doesn't meet codes. The penalty can be anything from a citation and fine, to an order to dismantle what you installed, or both.

Lawns remain popular in front yards, at least, in some areas. You may have read about homeowners who turned their front yard into a food garden or a wildflower meadow, only to get in trouble. (This stance is changing in some areas, though. For more on lawns and lawn alternatives, see Chapter 16.)



REMEMBER

If you live in a development, make sure to check the covenants of your HOA (homeowner's association) to see if there are any restrictions on hardscapes and plantings.

Considering children and pets' safety

If you have children or pets living with you or visiting now and then, their safety isn't just a matter of showing you care. Their safety can be or become a legal issue. When you have concerns or questions, check with your local municipality or homeowners association.

Here are a few basic principles to bear in mind:

- » **Incorporate raised beds or elevated planter boxes (for flowers as well as vegetables or herbs).** Kids and pets tend to prefer flat, easily accessible areas.

- » **Take out, and don't plant, any plants known to have poisonous leaves or berries.** Look them up; the information is readily available online. Cross-check with the American Association of Poison Control Centers. When in doubt, err on the side of caution and remove/avoid.
- » **Avoid planting thorny bushes or trees, especially in high-traffic areas.** These obstruct sightlines and access and also can snag or scratch skin and clothing.
- » **Monitor children and pets when they are in the yard.** Doing so is especially important if you lack fences or have a water feature.
- » **Never leave your tools, supplies, or sprays lying about . . . or even accessible.** Kids are curious, and these items are often hazards. Better safe than sorry — put stuff away, up high, out of reach. If you've decanted garden chemicals or sprays into other containers (jugs, jars, sprayers), be sure they're both clearly labeled *and* stored out of reach.
- » **Don't set up a play structure or swing set close to trees, fences, or the property line/neighbor's yards.** You don't want to risk injury or damage, to people *or* property.

Consider creating areas especially for children and pets, so the rest of the landscape is (ideally) freed up for your many other ideas and plans. Kids need places to play, relax, hide, or make forts. Get them involved in designing their areas and helping you around the yard. (How about a bean-pole teepee? Or a sunflower house?) Perhaps have a storage area or bench for their toys (see the section, “Designating storage areas,” later in this chapter for ideas).

Dogs are creatures of habit and will mark, and lounge, in the same spots, especially if you train them that way. If you create a run or outdoor play yard for a dog, make sure it's big enough for the breed, has shade/shelter from the hot sun, and is easy to clean. As for sandboxes, if cats are in the area, keep the box covered when not in use (because cats think they're litter boxes)!

Addressing water issues

Whether you have too much or too little, anticipating water issues is a big part of landscape design. We're not just talking about make sure you have a faucet for a hose hookup not too far from the flowerbed. There are two major areas of concern here, both related to climate/weather and both within your ability to exercise at least some measure of control:

- » **Flood control:** Your property may need a retention area to hold runoff during a major storm event. This tends to be more likely and urgent if your property slopes. Some municipal codes require residential properties to be ready for a 6- to 8-inch (15.2 to 20.3 cm) rain event. Check with City Hall and your codes officer and/or call a professional landscaper in your area to clarify and get advice.
- » **Collecting water:** In dry climates or areas with very long, hot summers, homeowners look for ways to gather and use what water they can for their yards and gardens. This can be anything from installing a so-called *rain garden* (a garden set up to deliberately receive and benefit from water running from your house's gutters) to setting up a rain-collection barrel to using *gray water* (basically, used household water from sinks and drains). You may get necessary information and guidance from your municipality and/or a local professional. For more discussions on all these avenues, check Chapter 5.

Designating storage areas

Inevitably, you need designated areas in your home landscape for storing things when you aren't using them and to avoid clutter. Vehicles may or may not go in the garage along with your gardening equipment, tools, and supplies.

When creating your landscape design, make sure you don't forget your storage needs. Here are some ideas:

- » **Storage shed:** You may need a shed dedicated to yard and garden maintenance if you don't already have one. Having one for your tools and garden supplies can help alleviate any crowding in your garage. (Or if you don't have a garage, a shed is a great place to keep all your yard gadgets and tools.) Think about how big it needs to be and where you want it. Don't forget to figure out if will block access or sun. Last but not least, for security and safety, be sure it has a latching or locking door.
- » **Potting shed:** These often look like playhouses, complete with shuttered windows and windowboxes, but they can be as practical as they are cute. Install shelves and hooks, a utility or dry sink, a potting bench, and hanging nesting wire baskets for storing gardening tools and supplies. You can also use a shed as a cool, dry place to dry freshly harvested bundles of herbs and to store stacked unused pots. (A *she-shed* is similar but may be less practical. It may look the same on the outside, but inside, harbors a comfy snoozing or reading nook, or art supplies.)

- » **Storage bins:** These can be anything from weather-tough plastic bins with fitted lids that get stashed somewhere until needed to the outdoor equivalent of a parson's bench — that is, a bench on your deck or patio whose seat lifts up to allow storage within.
- » **Outdoor closet:** This can be tall and skinny and perhaps fit into a corner. It's a place to store or hang long-handled tools such as rakes and shovels as well as perhaps a coiled hose and other useful items.



TIP

Make a list of items you expect to be storing; doing so helps clarify what you have and where you plan to put it. If you're good with numbers, you can go ahead and calculate the amount of space (volume) your stored tool collection would require and then you'll really know the size you need.

Site Analysis — Understanding What You Have

Here we come to grips with your property the way it is now:

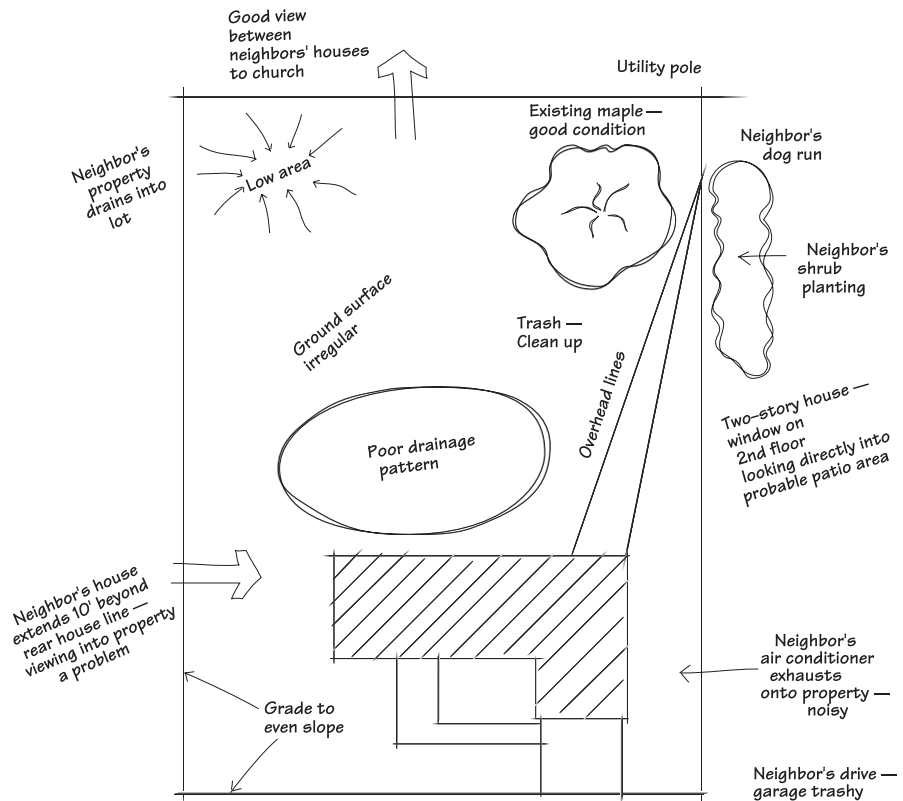
- » What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- » What do you like or dislike about your yard?
- » What kind of problems does your landscape have that you need to find solutions for?

This process of assessing your yard is called *site analysis*. This is the time to make a rough drawing. To do some serious drawing — with dimensions — check out Chapter 3.

Figure 1-1 is a sample of what your initial site analysis can look like when you're finished. You identify what you have to work with and imagine what improvements will be there soon.

The following sections help you analyze your site and include some common approaches to help you think fresh and creative thoughts about your landscape. The object here is to bring your unique landscape and its possibilities into sharper focus.

FIGURE 1-1:
A completed site analysis notes significant features of the property.



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Drawing your site analysis

Stick to these steps as you draw your site analysis:

1. Get a sheet of paper and a pencil and sketch your existing property.

Include your house with windows and doors, existing plants, and general north/south directions. Although you should try to draw to scale, your rough drawing doesn't have to be very precise.

2. Go outside and put the drawing on a clipboard and walk around your yard, making notations of the following:

- **Sun and shade:** Mark areas that are sunny or shady, and at what times of the day.
- **Views:** Note good and bad views — ones that you may want to preserve and ones you may want to block.

Good views — surrounding hills, the coast, maybe just the nearby skyline — are easy to recognize.

Bad views, on the other hand, take a little more eyeballing. For instance, determine whether the neighbors can see in your yard or you can see in theirs, or whether you feel the need to block your view of their garage or old-car collection. Determine whether you have things on your own property, like a utility or storage area, that you'd rather not see. Figure out what you'll see if you put in a raised deck. Look to see whether utility poles are visible. Check how the view changes when deciduous trees lose their leaves.

- **Prevailing winds:** Note if you regularly feel winds that you may be able to block with fencing or plants.
- **Slope and drainage:** Put in some arrows that give you a rough idea of the contours of your yard. Sloping ground or uneven terrain can be an interesting part of a landscape, especially if you accentuate it with walls or plants combined with stone to simulate a dry streambed. High points may also provide some views that you want to take advantage of.

On the other hand, sloping ground can also mean erosion or drainage problems that can threaten your house or yard. Be sure that water drains away from all the walls of your house. Mark down any areas that seem overly wet or where moss or algae is growing. If you can stand getting wet, go outside in a rainstorm and watch where excess water flows. Just don't take your clipboard with you!



WARNING

Chances are, your landscape isn't isolated, which means that changes you make can adversely affect a neighbor's property. Routing your drainage off your land and onto theirs isn't the answer (and of course, not a recipe for neighborhood harmony — no holiday card!). So, too, can your alterations lead to erosion beyond your property lines. Therefore, you must work to avoid such scenarios and find solutions that work within your own property. If the situation is daunting, seek advice/help from a professional.

- **Existing plants:** Draw in large trees, shrubs, vines, and perennials that you may want to preserve. (Leave out or cross off ones that you mean to get rid of.)
- **Interesting natural features:** A small stream or handsome rocks protruding from the ground can become special landscape features.
- **Noise, smells, and lights:** Let your senses go and write down anything else that you notice — lights at night, noise from next door, and even unpleasant odors. You may be able to do something about them.



- **Winter sights and sounds:** Look to see whether your plants are getting crushed by snow under the eaves. Determine where you put the snow when shoveling or snowblowing, or where a snowplow shoves piles. Be sure to avoid planting or installing seating in those areas.

Do this over a period of several days, at different times of the day. Doing so will give you an opportunity to observe your landscape better or more completely than you perhaps ever have before. In particular, notice when the sun shines (or doesn't) in different areas and for how long.

Does your yard have *microclimates*? Many do! This term refers to a spot that has different and unique conditions, compared to the rest of your landscape. Instead of struggling to alter its natural inclinations, we suggest you capitalize on them. To do so, for example, find moisture-loving plants for a soggy spot. Place a comfy chair in the perpetually shady corner, and put in ferns and other shade-loving plants around it.

3. **Make notations of what you see from *inside* the house including:**

- **Views:** Note the good views and the bad. Look out your windows; what do you see? A nice view of the yard or the neighbors' back porch? Determine who can see in the windows from the street or next door.
- **Sunlight:** Note whether the sun blazes through your windows, heating the house in the afternoon. Or perhaps you get a pleasant light that's cast on the kitchen table as you drink coffee in the morning.
- **Lights:** Observe whether car lights or signs shine through your window at night. (Ask yourself if a tree or even a vine-covered trellis could block that problem.)

4. **Where applicable, consider the needs outlined in the section, "Drawing within the Lines: Living with Practical Issues," earlier in this chapter.**

Note whether you're already accommodating these needs. Are you satisfied/happy? Can you reserve or even add space?

Knowing how much of your yard you can use

Most houses are plunked somewhere in the middle of the lot. Though the surrounding areas may vary in size, you almost always have a front yard, a backyard, and often two side yards — that's called a *four-sided landscape*.

At first, you may have a tough time overcoming the tradition that backyards are where you actually live, front yards are for show, and side yards (if any) are mostly ignored. We suggest you think outside the box and break some of those old rules.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

An accurate sense of where light falls and when in your landscape is so important. Even if you're not home when the sun is full-on a flowerbed, the plants will know — and you'll have planted sun-lovers. So, observe at morning, noon, and evening, and make note. When you're ready to purchase plants for your landscape (flip to Part 3), this information helps you match plants with appropriate light conditions.

Noting sunny and shady areas can also give you ideas about creating more comfortable outdoor living space. In midsummer, the south and western sides of the house are the sunniest and warmest. If you live in areas with cooler summers, place outdoor furniture in those same locations. If, however, you live in an area with hot summers, look into adding shade trees (see Chapter 11) or perhaps installing an arbor or pergola (see Chapter 10).



REMEMBER

Multitask and be flexible. Using your entire yard allows you to take advantage of different times of the day when one part or another of your landscape is at its best. If your backyard is baked on summer afternoons, you can retreat to the cool respite out front. If the under-eight crowd swarms over the play structure, perhaps you can move around to a side yard where you can discreetly keep an eye on the goings-on. A shady nook way in the back of the backyard can allow you to tune out the drone of a weed-whacker a few houses away. These sections break down the parts of your entire yard and give you some ideas to utilize them as potential living spaces.

Your front yard

Shield the front yard with walls of greenery or a privacy fence (flip to Chapter 6), and on weekend afternoons when the rest of the neighborhood is carousing in their backyards, you'll have the front all to yourself.

If you think that's too bold of a step (and it may well be for your neighborhood — or, as we keep cautioning, if you have an HOA), at least you can move some of your ornamental garden beds to the front instead of having a resource-gobbling, boring lawn. Give your home more curb appeal.

You may be surprised at how quickly a beautification copycat campaign can start up after the neighbors see you puttering among the flowers and butterflies.



TIP

Be aware that you may need to keep your front yard neat to avoid neighborhood resentment — in fact, your local municipality may even have a word with you about the state of your yard. If you're inspired to plant a prairie or a naturalistic woodland out front, talk to your neighbors first (and check with your local

municipality) so that they know what you have in mind. Keep well-groomed paths so that the landscape looks guided instead of frighteningly wild. (The reaction that you're trying to avoid is "Oh no! What if those weeds come into my yard?")

Your backyard

Backyards are usually best for children's play areas because you don't want them to careen out or chase balls into the street. If you're a veggie grower with kids, put your patch near the play area so you can keep one eye on them while you weed the zukes.



REMEMBER

Vegetable patches don't have to be relegated to the backyard — put them wherever the light and soil and convenience are best. Who could kvetch about a well-tended patch, planted in an interesting design of diagonals or squares with vegetables that are interspersed with flowers and herbs? Call it a "kitchen garden" if that helps elevate its reputation. (Keep in mind, though, that food gardens definitely have an off-season that is less attractive.)

Your side yard

Some properties, particularly in housing tracts, have side yards. They're often narrow, sometimes shady, and they're usually overlooked as nothing more than a way to get from the front yard to the back or a place to stash the trash and recycling bins. Give yourself reason to linger by setting up a hammock or moving a bistro table and chair to the area.

If it's sunny, your side yard can be the perfect place for a strawberry patch or a row of raspberry bushes. It can host a whimsical garden ornament of some kind or another (here's the place for your pink flamingo or garden gnome), a small garden pool or fountain, a little herb garden, maybe — and it will become a destination and a sanctuary of its own instead of a waystation.

Walking through the space

You may already have thought about what friends and family intend to do in the yard — picnicking, socializing, growing tomatoes, playing, and so on — but you may also want to think about how you and your family move through your yard.

Your list of outdoor wants and needs — eating, playing, sitting — is a lot simpler to divvy up when spaces are already separate, thanks to the geography of the yard and house. Chances are, you already know where the best patch of lawn is for that pitch-and-catch area you need. You also know the most discreet place to stash the compost pile. You know which neighbor will hate having to see your dog's kennel or run from their bedroom window and which one will sneak your pup a treat

when they're outside. You know where the sun beats down on late summer afternoons — perfect for an herb garden — and where the neighbor's oak tree casts a cool pool of shade for those patio cookouts that you can't wait to indulge in.

As you begin to get an idea of where the best places are for all the things on your wish list, stroll around and figure out the routes that will get you and others from one area to the next. As you begin fiddling with potential pathways, you may discover that they can make your garden seem bigger. Obscured by shrubs, ornamental grasses, or other tall plants, paths can double back, twist and turn, and run along for much longer than you may think in a limited space. (Chapter 7 is chock-full of information on designing and building pathways.)



TIP

If you're having trouble visualizing your paths, try this quick trick: sprinkle a biodegradable path of flour or oatmeal through your yard. You can see in a minute whether your path design works.

Focusing on privacy

Even if your neighbors aren't the busybody type, you may still find relief in building in privacy as you create your landscape plan. (Chapters 12 and 20 have ideas, including plant suggestions, for creating privacy.)

Here are some good ways to enclose and protect your yard or parts of it:

- » Tall hedges (see Chapter 12), and arbors (flip to Chapter 10) work wonders at making your yard your own space.
- » Trees are a natural for providing privacy, though if you install new ones, you'll either have to invest in bigger, more expensive specimens or be patient. See Chapter 11 for all sorts of options and ideas.
- » Walls, fences, and even privacy screens help to keep your noise in and other noise out — so that you don't have to keep shushing your kids or resenting the neighbor's kid with his noisy car. (Turn to Chapter 6.)
- » Privacy structures define the boundaries of your landscape. Imagine decorating your living room if it had no walls. A little tricky to make it feel cozy, isn't it? Outdoor living rooms work the same way. Walls make the furnishings — in this case, the plants and ornaments — look better by providing a backdrop. Put that dream fountain you invested in against a wall of lush greenery, and it becomes much more appealing than if the sidewalk, street, or a neighbor's yard forms the backdrop.

Knowing when you'll use your landscape

When dreaming up your ideal landscape, take into account the times of day *and* the times of year in which you plan to use your yard. For example:

- » If you plan to be outdoors in the late afternoon, figure out where you'll be most comfortable at that time of day. Maybe the shady spot under the big tree out back. If the sun shines hot where a patio is or may be, consider installing an overhead structure for shade or planting shade trees.
- » If you want to use the garden (or view the garden) at night, investigate and install well-chosen lighting (see Chapter 10).
- » If you still want to be outdoors during the rainy season, investigate creating a covered patio.
- » If bugs populate the yard at the same time that you do (summer evenings), a screened-in porch or patio will keep them at bay.
- » If you want to get outdoors early in the spring or well into autumn, keep or plant trees and structures that don't block the sun.
- » If you enjoy every minute of summer outdoors, choose trees, shrubs, and flowers that bloom throughout the season (refer to Part 3).

MULTIPURPOSE LANDSCAPING

You have tons of ideas but limited space. No worries. Design some parts of your home landscape to play more than one role or serve multiple purposes. Think functional as well as beautiful. You can find a wide array of good ideas online or by browsing at a garden center. Here are a few examples:

- Terrace a steep site so there are beds of plants alternating with flat, open spaces and stairs connecting them.
- Devote half of a backyard to soft grass for the kids to tumble in, and the other half to a patio or deck with outdoor furniture so they can be easily supervised by lounging adults.
- Replace a lawn with planter boxes flanking wide paths that lead to a destination dining/grilling area.
- Attach decorative containers to a privacy wall or fence, and fill with various colorful and cascading plants.
- Choose food plants that are also beautiful, such as blueberry bushes, Swiss chard, scarlet runner beans, even certain grain plants.

Designing a Low-Maintenance Landscape

Planning your landscape, installing the structures and plants, and admiring your efforts of the finished project are the most gratifying parts of the landscape process. They're also the most time-consuming (whether you do it all yourself, or hire help).



REMEMBER

Maintaining your landscape is just as important, so make sure you include upkeep in your vision and efforts. It's not realistic to ask living plants to thrive on neglect, plus they look so much better and stay in bounds when you tend them. Show you care, and your landscape will repay your attention by being a beautiful, fun, relaxing place to be.

If you want less maintenance, here are some good, sensible ideas:

- »» If you're often away, traveling for business or pleasure, you may want a yard with hardscape and very few plants. (See Part 2 for more on hardscape.)
- »» Avoid overplanting or using fast-growing plants that get too large for their space. They'll need to be pruned or even, in time, removed.
- »» Having cut flowers in annual beds adds lots of color to your yard, but you'll need to replant when you harvest for bouquets. Use lower-maintenance perennials or flowering shrubs instead.

An *annual* is a plant that completes its life in a single season, and they're generally planted once a year; find out more in Chapter 13. *Perennials*, on the other hand, return year after year and tend to be more full and floriferous as they mature. Chapter 14 explains perennials in more detail.

- »» Lawns are a lot of work and consume a lot of resources. Determine whether you want one. Consider having a much smaller one, or instead plant an easy-going groundcover. Check out Chapter 16 for ideas.
- »» If you plan to build wooden landscape elements like decks (refer to Chapter 8) and fences (see Chapter 6), plan on painting or applying preservatives every two to three years. Masonry (brick and concrete) needs less maintenance.
- »» If you install your landscape without an irrigation system, you end up having to water everything yourself . . . even if you live in a climate where rainfall helps. For a practical discussion on watering and various options, flip to Chapter 5.