

Although there may be many plants which you may want to grow, this information will help you narrow your choices. Nurseries and garden centers sell many types of plants, but not all can be placed in the same conditions. Approach a nursery professional with the information you have gathered, and they will gladly assist you in selecting plants to grow in the conditions that exist in your garden.

MICROCLIMATE

Although our corner of Illinois is categorized as a zone 5 (average coldest winter temperatures between -10 and -20 degrees Fahrenheit), geographical and man-made features create small sanctuaries which may exhibit conditions similar to zones warmer or colder than average. These are called microclimates, and offer gardeners opportunities to grow plants which normally may not thrive in their area.

For example, cities have large volumes of concrete and asphalt which retain heat well. Summers and winters in cities will seem warmer than in rural or less developed areas. Cities also offer protection from blasting winds in summer and winter, more so than the open expanses of rural areas. And areas in the center of cities are more protected than areas on the periphery, or developing areas.

Another geographical consideration is elevation. Cold air is heavier than warm air and sinks to low spots; so, lower areas may experience frost earlier and/or later than areas that are elevated.

With this in mind, use of microclimates

can significantly increase the success of growing plants which may not appreciate all of Illinois' weather idiosyncrasies.

THE PROFESSIONAL TOUCH

A final hint on designing...the secret of great designs is consistency and harmony. Using consistency helps create a harmonic, cozy, and restful atmosphere. This can be achieved through repetition of design elements such as: texture, plant type, flower color, flower shape, leaf color, or plant form (i.e. weeping, columnar, vase shaped). Random alteration of a variety of plants causes the eye to dart around the landscape with no focus point. When items are repeated they form a continuity from which a specimen will actually stand out.

For example, use drifts of one type of plant to create areas of harmony. One could use a plant with yellow foliage as a specimen if the surrounding plants are all of the same foliar color or texture. Select three to five plants to create drifts allowing your specimen plants to really catch the eye in your landscape.

ORIGINALITY

There are many plants frequently used in commercial landscapes (i.e. fast food restaurants, hotels, convenience stores) due to their versatility. These are tried and true die-hards that can be incorporated into residential landscapes. If they are used exclusively, however, they can impart a cold, commercial atmosphere where a warm, welcoming attitude would be more appropriate. This is not to say that such plants should not be used, but rather a reminder to be aware of their affects.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN



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BEGINNING TO DESIGN

How to place shrubs, perennials, and trees in a landscape may sound quite daunting and confusing. Many people are overcome with spring fever in May and rush to install whatever catches their eye. Either way remember that it is *your* yard and *you* must like how it looks. It does not matter what others like, or what all the neighbors are planting. Other people can give you input, but ultimately you have to be satisfied. There are no rules in landscaping regarding which plant looks best with another. The only restrictions are the cultural needs of the plants you choose, and if the following guidelines are used, the conditions of your site will indicate which plants are most appropriate. Take the time to plan and make a good design the first time; it is time well invested. The result of a good design is noticeable immediately as well as when the garden matures.

DRAW

Using graph paper, draw the area to scale; one square equals one foot. Measure! Don't just guess.

Indicate where there are retaining walls, utilities, windows, and which way is north. As the process progresses, it will be easier to visualize proportion and distance with this drawing. Then, when it's time to indicate plants in areas, the proper number of plants can be estimated. This way, neither too few plants are purchased, leaving the area sparse; nor too many. Don't choose plants yet, you are not ready!

DIG

Wait! Just dig enough to determine your soil type. Clay soil is gummy, yellow, and does not fall apart well in your hands. Clay soil holds water too well. This will need to be amended. Sandy soil is loose, dry, and...sandy. It is lacking organic matter (more or less). Amending the soil to make it drain well, but retain moisture, will significantly improve the success of any planting. Well drained soil refers to water movement through the soil, not across the surface. Example: A hillside with clay soil is not necessarily a well drained site. Note areas of poor or good soil on the drawing you have made.

SUN

Determine the sun patterns of the area. Observe the shadows as the day progresses. Shade is less than 2 hours of sun a day. Partial sun/partial shade is 4-6 hours of sun a day. Full sun is 6 hours of sun a day or more. Note areas of more or less sun on the drawing.

GEOGRAPHY

Note areas where: there are slopes, low areas where water may stand after a rain, downspouts empty, water may flow during downpours, and areas which may be affected by strong winds.

HOW BIG !?

Determine how large the gardening area will be. Points to consider are:

- 1) The larger the garden, the less lawn there is to mow and maintain.
- 2) Placing trees in beds of shrubs and per-

ennials makes mowing easier, and debris drops into a bed rather than on the lawn.

- 3) Smooth curves around the area make mowing easier than tight curves.
 - 4) Large areas of lawn can be broken down into "rooms" with garden areas acting as "walls".
 - 5) Make beds at least 5'-6' in depth, plant height roughly correlates to plant width. The smallest shrubs average 3'-4' wide.
 - 6) Keep a buffer of 12"-18" between the mature width of the plants and any structure to allow for easy access for maintenance of windows, siding, decks, etc.
 - 7) Pruning should not be a substitute for good planning.
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WHAT PLANT WHERE? Part I

STOP! Do not choose types of plants yet. Only select what size plants you would like in particular areas. However, it is just as important to know what you don't want. Arrange small shrubs and perennials toward the front of an area, and large shrubs, small trees, and large perennials toward the back so that the small plants aren't lost amidst the giants. Now is a good time to decide where you want color for certain seasons, fragrance, or winter interest.

WHAT PLANT WHERE? Part II

FINALLY! Now choose plants for the area based upon the information collected. Knowing soil type, sun patterns, drainage, exposure to wind, and how large, or small, the plant must be begins to narrow the selection for plants suited for that spot.