

Design Principles for Creating a Spectacular Perennial Garden

Where to Begin?

- **Know the site**
 - Sun or shade qualities, wind, moisture, drainage
- **Identify purpose of garden bed**
- **Study site from outside/inside home**
 - Are there views to screen, to frame?
- **Determine size of bed**
 - Depth of foundation bed should be 1/3 the height of the house
- **Determine shape of bed**
 - Curved lines are softer, more natural, less formal than straight lines
- **Identify plants already there you want to keep**
- **Test soil to determine quality (Soiltest.umass.edu)**
 - The secret to success in the garden lies in the soil!
 - Sandy soil? Add leaf mold or peat moss (sparingly) to improve retention
 - Clay soil? Add blend of leaf mold, peat moss, compost, manure to loosen
 - Every 3 years, add 1-2" organic material to top of bed; work in with spade
- **Decide on style of bed**
 - Traditional, modern, woodland, cottage, formal, informal
- **Choose color palette for bed (Limit to 3)**
 - Complementary Colors (opposite on wheel) red/green, blue/orange, purple/yellow
When used together, each makes the other color appear brighter
 - Analogous Colors (adjacent on wheel) When used together, these have a softer effect
 - Warm colors – red, orange, yellow – energetic, cheerful
 - Cool colors – blue, green, purple – calm, soothing

The Design Process

In landscape design, you are both artist and architect as you work creatively with a plant's color, texture, form (shape), and size. When selecting and placing plants, focus on principles of contrast, repetition, and proportion in your design. Your goal is to combine plants in ways that create rhythm, balance, and unity in your garden beds.

Tips for Designing a Garden Bed

- **Select and place structural plants first (trees, shrubs, evergreens)**
 - Decide on forms of structural plants - round, conical, mounding, weeping, columnar
 - Plan for the mature size of plants (Research before selecting)
 - Trees or large shrubs provide weight and stability in garden beds
 - Include evergreens, ornamental grasses, or woody plants with unusual branching to provide structure and interest year-round
 - Foundation plantings should be 3 feet from house to allow for growth and maintenance
 - Small trees and larger shrubs in foundation beds can soften corners of house
- **Contrast colors and textures of plants to create interest in design**
 - Combine complementary colors or include warm colors in beds to create energy
 - Combine analogous colors or use cool colors to create a soothing effect
 - White makes other colors pop! Gold and chartreuse brighten shady areas
 - Combine dark colors with light colors to heighten the effect of each
 - Combine plants with interesting foliage, different textures, and various shades of green to create a beautiful garden with interest throughout the year.
- **Contrast forms and heights of plants to create interesting rhythm in garden bed**
 - Include ornamental grasses to create movement in garden
 - Use bold shapes or vertical lines to attract and hold the viewer's eye
 - Vary height of plants from shortest in front of bed to tallest in back to achieve a layered look and add depth to the design
 - Create a focal point for the bed using a bold, specimen plant or hardscape element (bench, arbor, statuary, ceramic pot, garden art)
 - Select plants with varying bloom times to ensure year-round interest
- **Repeat the same colors, forms, and heights of plants throughout the bed to balance and unify**
 - Use the same color at various points to direct the flow of movement through the bed
 - Plant in multiples of 3,5,7. Odd numbers are more appealing than even in design
 - Use groupings of the same plant together to create impact!
 - Limit the variety of plants to simplify and unify your design
 - Use native plants when possible to attract pollinators and ease maintenance
- **Make sure each plant in the garden bed has a purpose for being there (to provide structure, contrast, year-round interest, to create balance, rhythm, serve as focal point, to unify design)**
- **Add your personal touch**