

New plant varieties ease garden upkeep

Continued from Page 1

job (as a landscape architect) is education — I have to let them know what the options are."

Function is also a driving force in formal landscaping. "How we use a yard or setting dictates (the need for) a manageable setting."

"People have practical needs — that might mean screening neighbors, giving privacy, providing open spaces, giving vistas, making open areas for children or animals, showing color or adding texture."

Informal or natural landscaping can't do that, he said. "People can spend thousands and thousands of dollars and get nothing for it."

PEOPLE ARE more knowledgeable about what they want and what they can get, Lehmann said. The misconception about high maintenance formal landscaping is no longer accepted without question.

"If it's planned well, designed well and sited well, there are aspects of low maintenance in formal gardens," he said. Planned well means choosing the right materials, designed well means assembling them correctly and sited well — which is perhaps the least understood — means looking at the site as a micro-environment.

"It means taking a very good look at exposure, how much light and wind will it get, on-site water, potential water sources off-site — that all relates directly to what I can do."

Planning what materials should be used in formal landscaping is also critical — not only from the plants' chances for survival, but because of the appearance. "There are a couple of dozen plants that have been heavily used — ashes, junipers, red maples — these are very over-used."

"Landscaping in this area is not anywhere as professional as it should be — I see it slowly turning around, but it is very slowly," he said.

"There are hundreds of thousands of plants available and (a good landscape architect has) to take advantage of that," Lehmann said.

JAMES SCOTT, president of James C. Scott &

Associates in Bloomfield Hills, said a request for formal gardens are directly related to how much money a client has to spend.

"There's nothing more expensive than a formal English garden," he said. Whether a client wants formal landscaping depends on individual tastes. "Much of what we do in the Grosse Pointes is more formal than what we do in Bloomfield Township."

Residential landscaping — at least on an individual home scale — is more likely to be formal than informal. Offices, light industrial parks, and commercial projects are more likely to opt for natural, informal landscaping.

Formal landscaping may be on the rise, but Scott said it's doubtful it will become as popular as informal landscaping if for no other reason than maintenance. "If (formal landscaping) looks nice if a tree doesn't die or something, but if something happens, it could ruin the whole effect," Scott said.

Scott said it's the duty of the landscape architect to point out the potential pitfalls and pluses of either style. Maintenance is no longer the problem it once was, but formal landscape still requires more maintenance than informal landscape.

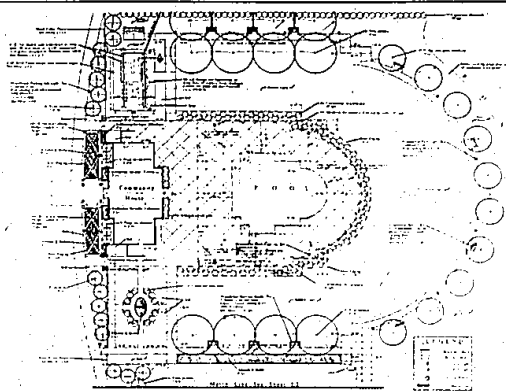
"The more maintenance that is done, the better the formal landscape is going to look," he said. "It's almost like a finely manicured putting green."

"Random, free form, loosey goosey landscape architecture," he said, "can (aesthetically) survive with less work."

Scott said landscaping and styles are always evolving and speculated that many projects will probably be a combination of formal and informal elements — neither will be exclusively used.

"Something like a formal hedge running through an informal, rolling landscape," he said. "The berries and boulders — they're getting a little overdone."

"People will be saying to themselves, 'Why not get into a more orderly landscape plan?'"



This planting plan shows the details of the Country Club Village Community House grounds.

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Sales figures contradictory

AP — New home sales jumped 6.7 percent in August to their highest level in a year, after having retreated a month earlier, the government said.

All regions posted gains except the West, where the number of sales was unchanged. Sales soared in the Midwest, up 24.7 percent to a 101,000 annual rate and wiping out a 15.6 percent loss a month earlier.

The report contrasted with a National Association of Realtors' survey last week that found sales of existing homes had fallen 2.1 percent in August, the second straight decline.

The Realtors had attributed the decline to "uncertainty over if and when the economic recovery is coming," despite mortgage rates that have declined nearly one percentage point in the last year.

The Departments of Commerce and of Housing and Urban Development said sales of single-family homes nationally totaled a seasonally adjusted annual rate of \$40,000, up from a revised \$36,000 in July.

The departments had last estimated July's decline at 8.5 percent rather than the 2.7 percent drop in today's report. But June's initial 4.0 percent advance was revised down to a 2.6 percent gain.

The August increase was the sixth gain in new home sales since they dropped to 414,000 last January, the trough of the housing recession. And the August level was the highest since a 541,000 rate in July 1990.

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