

Rocky road to garden beauty

(AP) — Rocks and stones in a garden are a little bit like weeds — if correctly put to use, they can add value and interest to the garden. Size is not a factor; from pebbles to boulders, rocks can be put to good use.

Rocks add strength, texture and color that complement plants. For the most dramatic display, use rocks that are indigenous to your area. If you are attempting to create a natural setting, rocks and stones should look like they belong.

With a little imagination, every size and shape can be used. Small stones can be raked over a weed barrier, like black plastic or landscape fabric, to create a fine-textured mulch. Stone mulches around trees and shrubs help protect trunks and stems from mower damage during the summer.

Larger rocks make attractive edging along paths and around irregular-shaped beds of flowers, shrubs, or a mix of ground covers and spring bulbs. Rocks can be set on the surface or slightly into the soil to produce variety. Large rocks can also be used to hold back mounds of soil raised planting beds. A slightly irregular shape helps create a natural appearance to your garden design.

A large, interestingly shaped boulder can serve as an accent point in the landscape. It can mark the entrance to a driveway

or tone down an exposed water or gas meter. When rocks are used to cover a problem, make certain that all items in the design blend well together. Too often, the rocks and related landscaping only draw attention to the problem.

Flat stones make ideal stepping stones and pathways in the garden. When they are set into the soil level with the surrounding lawn, you will be able to mow right over them. Sunk stones are also easier and safer to walk on and they also can be used for a rough-textured patio or set of steps.

If you are able to get enough flat stone and rock, you may even be able to construct an attractive stone wall, which can be a work of art and add greatly to the appearance of your landscape or garden.

Stone walls add height and can be constructed for a planting space on top. Wall can also be functional to hold soil or stabilize a slope on the property.

Natural rock ledges that crop out of the ground also can be used to advantage. When the soil is so shallow that mowing is a problem, you can expose more of the rock to create small planting pockets of soil.

If the existing stone is set quite low, add more rock layers to give some additional height to the final design.

Energy from page 1G

difficult for some prospective buyers to meet such guidelines.

"These plans are designed to meet the needs and desires of the consumer by allowing eligible applicants to finance a home under a variety of scenarios," said Kathy Pluton, a spokeswoman for Comerica in Detroit.

"Flexibility is the driving force of the industry today," Comerica also offers a home-rehabilitation mortgage, a plan sponsored by the Federal Housing Administration, which

allows buyers to finance the purchase and improvements to a home at the same time. Again, an energy consultant or appraiser helps determine what amount can be borrowed.

National Bank of Detroit does not offer energy-efficient mortgages, but will, on a case-by-case basis, allow extra credit for buyers who install new windows or other significant home improvements, said Renee Alice, second vice president for NBD.

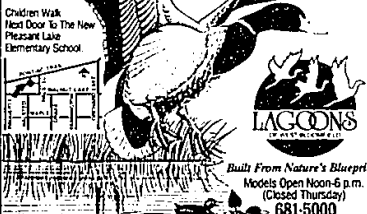
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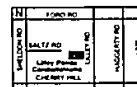
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