

# Landscaping begins with a plan

Careful landscape planning can increase your family's enjoyment of your property, add to the value of your home and decrease the time and money costs of planting and maintaining the landscape.

A carefully planned landscape also tends to look better than an unorganized planting.

Curt Peterson, Extension horticulture specialist at Michigan State University, suggests looking at the landscape as an extension of the home. It includes public, private and utility areas and may include special use areas, such as a pet run, vegetable garden or volleyball court. Well thought out landscaping can help define use areas, frame desirable views and screen out unattractive vistas, as well as enhance the general appearance of the property.

The first step in planning the landscape is to make a scale drawing of the property with the major features clearly marked — walks, drives, buildings, utilities, shade trees, etc.

Then analyze your family's needs and wants and determine how the present landscape does or does not meet them throughout the year. Does the prevailing wind fill the driveway with snow? Are the garbage cans the dominant feature in the view from the dining room window? Is the charm of the old mulberry tree fading faster than the mulberry stains on the carpet — and on the dog? Would you like to have a flower or vegetable garden, a grassy area where the children could play, a patio or deck, or storage for a recreational vehicle? Would you like to spend less time maintaining your home grounds and more time enjoying them?

"The next question is, will plants do the job for you in the landscape?" Peterson says. "Perhaps a living snow fence of shrubs in the proper place could redirect blowing snow for you. Establishing a utility area in a less prominent place in the yard and screening it with shrubs or a section of fence could improve the view at mealtime. And a fruitless, high quality shade tree could replace the mulberry."

Before you start looking at plants, however, you need to determine what limitations the planting site places on your choice. The growing conditions on a site — whether the spot is low and wet, hot and sunny in the summer, shady, exposed to the wind and sun in winter — will limit your choices in plants.

"Certain plants have very strict growing requirements," Peterson says. "Others are more tolerant, but most have a fairly limited range of light, moisture and soil conditions in which they do best. A common, inexpensive plant in a site that offers it optimum growing conditions will do more for the landscape than an expensive, exotic, poorly adapted plant that is just barely surviving."

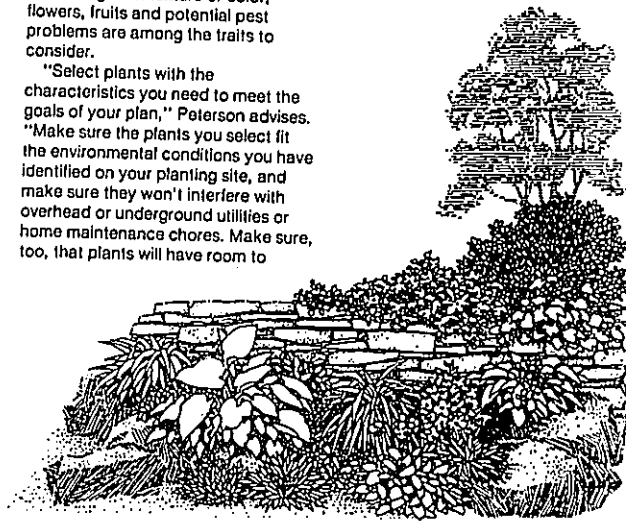
Other considerations in the planting site are the location of overhead and underground utilities, the need for an unobstructed view (of play areas for young children, for instance, or of the street and approaching traffic for drivers exiting the property), ease of maintenance, space available and proximity to the house and other structures.

By the time you've thought through these considerations, you can begin to consider types and families of plants

and decide what ornamental characteristics are important to you. Mature size, shape, color of foliage, presence of foliage all year round, interesting bark texture or color, flowers, fruits and potential pest problems are among the traits to consider.

"Select plants with the characteristics you need to meet the goals of your plan," Peterson advises. "Make sure the plants you select fit the environmental conditions you have identified on your planting site, and make sure they won't interfere with overhead or underground utilities or home maintenance chores. Make sure, too, that plants will have room to

develop. Drastic pruning to keep a plant within bounds is no substitute for choosing a smaller plant better adapted to the site."



## Energy saving tips

Use a thermometer or timer to eliminate over or undercooking.

At home, set the furnace thermostat at 65 degrees in winter and at least five degrees lower when sleeping or away. Higher heating temperatures are recommended for places with the sick, elderly or with infants. In summer, set the air conditioner thermostat at 78 degrees.

A water heater is a major energy user. Try a lower thermostat setting. Install water flow restrictions in showers and faucets — they cut hot water use without affecting family comfort. And when replacing a water heater, choose an energy-efficient model.

Clean or replace filters as needed in heating and cooling systems. Close vents in unused rooms and insulate ducts and pipes in unheated spaces.

Keep direct sunlight out of living spaces in summer, but let it in during winter; it helps warm the room.

Fully load clothes dryers and dish washers to save energy. Turn off unnecessary lights and appliances.

Attics and their doors should be insulated to the recommended level. Find out what the level is at a store that sells insulation. Check under floors, around basements, crawl spaces and foundation walls for adequate insulation, too. And exterior walls may need insulation.

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