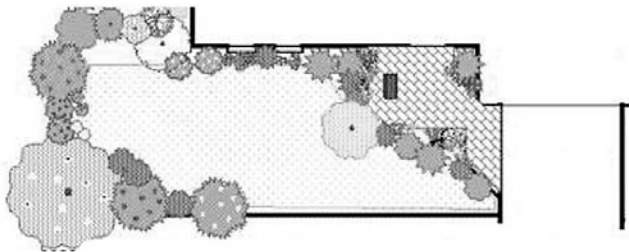


Foundation Plantings

At one time foundation plantings were mainly used to hide the bases of older houses. It is no longer considered necessary or desirable to plant a line of shrubs all the way across the foundation. Plantings at the front of a house are used to complement the home appearance, to blend it into the surroundings and to create an inviting entrance.

Many designers now like to refer to the area in front of the house as the entry garden to emphasize that the purpose of this area is to complement, not camouflage, the house. The entry garden can incorporate any of the areas that are in the public view.

Parts of a Foundation Planting



The foundation planting is a combination of the entrance planting, the corner planting and a transition area that joins them. Other areas such as the walk, lawn, borders and drive are also incorporated in the entrance garden. As a unit, these plantings should lead the eye toward the front door and welcome the visitor.



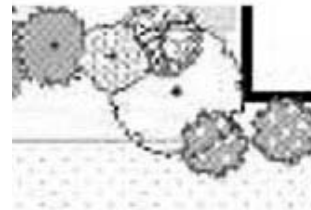
Entrance Planting: The area nearest the entrance door should have a welcoming feel. Plants for this area should be interesting and attractive throughout the year since they will be seen

closely. They should be low both to avoid a hemmed-in feeling and for security and visibility.

A focal point near the entrance will attract attention. You might use a small sculpturally branched tree underplanted with a contrasting ground cover or a planter with a specimen shrub. Make sure that any small trees that are planted near an entrance are positioned so that they do not block the view and so that they have room for mature growth.

This area could also incorporate a small patio with a bench for guests, a small herb or perennial garden, or any other type of planting that will be attractive and interesting in all seasons.

Corner Planting: Corner plantings help visually tie the house into the surrounding landscape. They can screen side yards, as well as curve forward to join, or give the illusion of joining, other plantings.



Corner plant groupings should extend beyond the corner of the house. A small ornamental tree can be located near the house corner so that it visually overlaps the edge of the house, yet does not actually touch the house at maturity.

Small trees can be incorporated into the corner planting by widening the planting bed or by including them visually. Plant the tree so that it overlaps the house edge from most angles. Tall upright plants at the corners emphasize the vertical end of the house and can look very stiff and awkward. For very tall buildings or homes, a group of several upright plants along with smaller plants may provide height without an overpowering, single vertical accent.

Transition Planting: Transitional plantings should generally be simple and low. Many houses that are small or have attractive architecture do not need plantings between the entrance planting and the corner planting. A bed of groundcover or mulch



may be all that is necessary to tie the entrance planting and corner plantings together and make maintenance

and mowing easier. However, long open spaces may need low plants to fill the expanse.

Walks: Entrance walks should be located to provide adequate plant spacing and direct access from the driveway. Ideally, entrance walks should be at least 4½ feet wide to allow two people to walk comfortably side by side. Consider making a broader paving area just before entering the house.

Walkways should be of an attractive material that complements the house. Avoid using surfaces such as wood or slate that become slick when wet. Plants bordering walks and porches must be selected to avoid obstructing the path or snagging clothes as they grow.

Entrance walks should usually be straight rather than curved. A curving path looks good only if there is a clear reason for the curve: around a boulder or tree, around a shrub or perennial bed.

Lawns: The shape of the lawn itself is an important part of the entrance garden. The lines formed by the juncture of the entry garden and lawn should be designed for a pleasing shape, whether straight or curved. If curves are used, they should be gentle and sweeping. Excessive curves give a busy look and are difficult to mow around. In front yards that are very small or heavily shaded, it may be desirable to plant a groundcover instead of lawn.

Driveways: The largest area of many front yards is the drive and parking area. The drive should be designed to be as unobtrusive as possible while providing convenient access and parking. Avoid the urge to line driveways with flowers or other edging plants, since this will focus attention on the drive and garage rather than on the entrance.

Borders: Plantings around the borders of a property help define the space and further frame the house and garden. They should be compatible with the rest of the entry plantings in color and style. Use most plants in borders rather than in island beds or as individual plants in the lawn to create an open, spacious look and decrease maintenance.

Design Elements

Line: The contour of a line creates a sense of direction as well as a sense of movement. The eye follows garden lines such as edges of a walk or the curve of a flowerbed. The character of a line creates a mood. Gentle, slow curves and horizontal lines are seen as restful while jagged diagonals or vertical lines create excitement and tension.

Form: Shapes defined by lines are the most readily seen aspects of a landscape. Plant shapes divide and define the spaces in the garden. Some forms are more dramatic than others and attract attention. The form of the plants selected and their placement are critical to creating comfortable spaces.

Structure: Evergreens and plants with strong winter forms are used to give basic year-round structure to the foundation planting. Structural plantings and hardscaping (paving and walls) are the equivalent of floors, ceilings and walls in outdoor rooms.

Texture: Consider texture carefully when selecting plants for a foundation. Rough, coarse textures are informal and visually dominant, while fine, smooth textures have a more formal, elegant feeling. Coarse leafed plants such as leatherleaf mahonia offer a dramatic textural effect against rugged stone. A fine textured plant such as boxwood may look better with a more refined material such as a smooth brick. Use more than just one type of texture to avoid lack of interest.

Color: The colors of stone, brick and paint determine what colors of leaf and flower will complement a house. Repeat some of the house colors in the plantings to create unity, and use contrasting colors where accent is desired. Entry gardens are usually most effective when the color scheme is kept simple and predominantly green. Use plants with brightly colored leaves only in limited quantity for emphasis.

Design Principles

Although designers will differ in the relative importance that they assign to these design principles, they are all useful guidelines to follow in planning your landscape.

Simplicity: More is not necessarily better. Simple designs are both easier to care for and often more visually pleasing. Omit details that will not have a major impact on the landscape to keep it uncluttered.

Limit the number of different paving and structural materials, types of plants, and colors in a landscape in order to get maximum impact from each. There should only be one striking specimen plant in most foundation plantings. More will confuse rather than direct attention.

Variety: While simplicity is essential to good design, there should still be enough variation in form, texture and color to create interest. Where the balance between variety and simplicity falls will vary from person to person.

Balance: This design term applies to the relationship between elements in the landscape. Balance is created when parts of a landscape appear of equal visual "weight." Balance can be formal or informal (also called symmetrical or asymmetrical.) Formal balance is achieved when one side of the landscape is a mirror of the other, while informal balance uses unequal sizes and numbers of plants and other elements in equilibrium.

Unity: A garden where all the various elements work together visually has unity. Repeating plants, building materials and forms ties a garden together. Using plants that are harmonious in form, texture and color creates unity, helps avoid cluttered design and creates an illusion of space.

Emphasis: Contrast of color, size, form or texture is used to focus attention on important elements of a landscape such as an entrance. Specimen or accent plants that provide strong interest throughout the seasons create emphasis.

A specimen plant is one used for unique beauty or as an outstanding example of its type. It should have a position of importance and have seasonal interest.

By drawing attention to itself, it draws attention to the entrance. Only one specimen plant of unusual character should be used in the front landscape.

Style: Adapt the foundation plantings to the style of the home. Informal plantings are suited to traditional, country and contemporary settings, while sheared evergreens look best with more formal styles.

Some housing types have particular landscape styles associated with them. The Charleston walled garden is a classic example. While it is not necessary to be rigorously tied to a particular style, landscaping in the public area should combine well with the rest of the neighborhood and natural surroundings.

Scale: The relative size of one part of a landscape to another and to the house and its surroundings is essential for good scale. Small and one-story houses will generally need smaller plantings than large, two story structures. Avoid a congested and overgrown look by using plants that are in proper scale with the house.

Planning

Designing your planting on paper ahead of time can save time and prevent costly mistakes. There are many ways to plan a landscape. Some people draw their plans out very formally and to scale, while others simply sketch out a rough plan on scrap paper. Whatever method you use is all right so long as you have a plan.

To foresee what your garden will look like in real life, you can lay out the bed lines on the ground with a hose. Drawing in shapes on tracing paper laid over a photo of your house will also help determine correct placement of plants for balance. Make sure that you draw in mature sizes. There are also computer programs that can help you visualize how a mature landscape will appear.

Design Errors to Avoid

Overplanting: This is probably the most common failure of foundation plantings. Know the ultimate sizes of plants and allow for growth. Do not use tall plants in locations where they will eventually cover windows.

It was once assumed that plants must surround the house to conceal the foundation. Modern houses and older ones do not need this screening. In fact, in a humid climate, it is better to keep the foundation planting low and away from the house structure.

Overplanting can be caused by the desire to achieve a "finished" look as quickly as possible, often on a limited budget. Instead of overplanting with cheap, small, young shrubs (of the size sold in 1-gallon containers) to give an effect of instant maturity, use fewer plants of more mature size. A few well-placed plants are more impressive than many small ones.

Visual Confusion: Avoid competing elements that detract from the main entrance and the house in general. Isolated beds or plants in the middle of open lawn area are some of these competing elements. Excessive use of accent or specimen plants, or of many different paving materials, are others.

Excessive Formality: Symmetrical balance is often overused in designing home landscapes. Although easy to accomplish, it is overly formal for most homes and has a stiff appearance. Asymmetrical balance is often more desirable for residential landscapes as balance is created without monotony. Upright or pyramidal shrubs near the entrance are rarely appropriate except for very large and formal homes.

Drainage & Moisture Control

In South Carolina's humid climate, landscaping should be designed to limit moisture near the house that can lead to structural damage. Watering plants near a house foundation (within 5 to 10 feet) can cause moisture problems. Plantings near the house should be drought-tolerant so that supplemental watering can be avoided in this area. Avoid planting under the eaves. Drier soil cuts down on mildew problems and moisture damage and discourages insect pests like termites and roaches.

Make sure that the ground close to the house is graded to channel water away from the house. Ground covers and organic mulches should be kept at least 12 inches away from the house's foundation in order to avoid giving a bridge to termites. This area can be filled with crushed gravel or stone.

Shrubs of more than 6 feet tall at maturity should be located so that their foliage will be at least 5 feet away from the walls. Shorter shrubs should have at least a 3-foot clearance between them and the house. This allows for adequate air circulation for house foundation vents and helps prevent mildew. Allow adequate spacing between plants also, to prevent later crowding and excess pruning.

Plant Choices

There are many things to consider when choosing plants for your landscape. You should know the characteristics of the plant such as mature size and shape and whether it is evergreen or deciduous. Select plants that are pest-resistant; hardy and heat-tolerant for your area; and adapted for the sun, soil and moisture conditions in your yard. Make sure that plants for the area within 5 to 10 feet of the foundation are drought-tolerant. It is better to figure out the attributes that you will need in an area and select plants that meet those conditions, rather than pick plants and then try to find a place for them.

Trees: Trees frame the house and provide background. Large trees should be farther from the house than small trees. Check the mature width of the tree to ensure that its branches will not rub against the house at maturity. Do not block the front view of the house.

Small ornamental trees can be located near a corner or as an accent in the area near a door. Good choices are dogwood, redbud, Japanese maple, crape myrtle, star magnolia and sourwood. Treeform evergreen shrubs such as wax myrtle, burford holly, ligustrum or cherry laurel can also be used in small areas.

Shrubs: Evergreen shrubs have always been the mainstays of foundation plantings. Shrubs that lose their leaves can be incorporated into an entry garden if they provide year round interest from striking form, bark or berries. Shrubs should generally be low and moderate in growth rate to reduce maintenance needs.

Groundcovers: Groundcovers can be used extensively in foundation plantings and are flattering to most Southern house styles. A continuous planting of one kind of groundcover can tie plantings together, creating unity among groups

of shrubs or among trees and shrubs. Groundcovers can be used to provide a natural and attractive edging for the lawn.

Perennials & Annuals: Herbaceous plants can provide seasonal interest and colorful accents. It is important to choose perennials that look good both in and out of bloom. Foliage perennials such as hostas are excellent choices for foundation plantings. Annuals should be chosen for long bloom and ease of care. Make sure that these plants receive regular maintenance. A small space used for flowers should usually contain only one type or color to assure visual harmony.

Purchasing Healthy Plants: Look for plants with healthy foliage and make sure they are rooted firmly in the soil in the container or ball. Look for good foliage color and strong branches. Check to see if the plants have plenty of live, light tan or white

roots. Dark brown or black, limp and sparse roots are symptoms of cold damage or root rot disease. Avoid plants that are root-bound in containers. Avoid plants with roots exposed on the surface or with roots growing out the drain holes. The soil ball of balled-and-burlapped plants should remain firm, rounded and intact when handled.

Prepared by Karen Russ, HGIC Information Specialist, and Bob Polomski, Extension Consumer Horticulturist, Clemson University. (New 12/99.)

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