

Art and Ornament in the Garden

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The Principles of Landscape Design

Every good garden designer, professional or homeowner, follows landscape design principles when creating effective outdoor spaces. Which principles you wish to feature in your garden is entirely up to you; however, knowledge of all of the principles will help you to establish your personal style. As Tommy Church put it, "Style is a matter of taste; design a matter of principle."

Scale, or **Proportion**, is the physical relationship of masses of objects. If you stand in a space, or look at a photo of a space, it is the relationship of objects that you see when you squint. A redwood tree is of different scale than a bird bath, for example.

Scale is very important in a garden. If the scale is off--something is out of proportion--that situation needs to be addressed first. For example, if several large Douglas firs surround a small garden, first we will need to visually bring down the vertical scale of the place, perhaps by adding mid-sized trees such as Japanese maples (which also contrast, texturally and by color, wonderfully with the firs). Another response would be to remove some of the firs so they do not have such an impact on the space.

Balance works with scale in that a well-balanced landscape takes into consideration the scale of its objects. If there is an element which is visually overwhelming off to the side of the garden, such as a 500-year-old oak tree, the designer would want to visually balance the garden by adding something of similar heft to the other side of the garden, such as a gazebo or ornamental tool shed. Well-designed informal gardens reveal an underlying balance which can be quite satisfying. **Symmetry** is balance taken one step further. Formal European gardens, with straight lines and visual axis, usually display this principle quite readily.

Unity: a garden has unity if the visitor feels that he or she is in a unique place. Although the garden can have distinctive spaces within the larger space, overall each area feels as if part of a larger whole. The effect might be comparable to Disneyland where each "land" has a distinctive feel, yet the entire area is unmistakably connected. **Harmony**: choosing harmonious elements is one way of creating a unified garden. Harmonious elements are usually found together, such as plants from a similar ecosystem or building materials from the same historical period. **Repetition** is another effective way of creating unity within the garden. Repeating a certain color, texture, material, plant, or even a plant characteristic throughout the entire garden is an effective way of creating unity in the garden.

Unity is usually achieved in a garden without seemingly trying if the garden is designed by one person, all at once. If, however, the garden is added to over a period of years--or centuries--sometimes the unity of the site is lost. An effective way to re-establish the unity of the garden is subtly repeat a certain element found in the existing garden.

Variety is sometimes referred to as the opposite of unity because too much variety can cause the overall unity of the garden to suffer. While this is sometimes the case, it is also true that a garden with

a variety of carefully chosen materials, thoughtfully arranged with consideration of the whole garden, can be quite lovely. Classic Japanese gardens in particular illustrate this principle by introducing many types of paving within a small space, yet maintaining a harmonious (and unified) whole. Variety within a narrow range of parameters, such as paving materials, work together to create an interesting garden. It is when there is a variety of many parameters, such as plant materials, paving, walls and garden art that the overall design suffers.

Rhythm (or **Sequence**) can be created by repeating the same or similar objects in a sequential manner. An example would be a row of trees of the same species, or statues of goddesses lined up along a path. In formal, European gardens, sometimes the rhythm is quite strong, and it is often used to emphasize direction and movement

A **Focal Point** (or **Accent**) is a garden material that differs from everything around it; it is limited in quantity in relation to surrounding materials. It enlivens the space and often sets the mood. It can also bring meaning to the garden either in the eyes of the gardener or the visitor. A work of art, an ornamental detail, or even a single plant can serve as focal point.

Contrast is the juxtaposition of two landscape elements, in almost equal quantity, which may have differences in materials, texture, color, or mass, among other things. Use of contrast is one of the landscape designers most useful tools--and most effective. It's like that famous phrase: the two of them together are greater than their whole. Gardens with creative use of contrast are among the most exciting.

Transition is the arrangement of objects with varying textures, forms or sizes in a sequential order, such as from coarse to medium to fine textures or large to medium to small scale. Gardens with a good sense of transition feel comfortable and balanced.