Basic Landscape Planning for Your Family

by Charlee Ware, Kingman Area Master Gardener

One of the best things about living in Arizona is spending time outdoors. Whether your yard is postage stamp size or acres, landscaping should cater to your family’s activities and comforts. Landscape planning, either simple or elaborate, starts with a list of the residents’ requirements.

January is a time for making pledges and promises for a better year. Let’s begin with a plan to enhance your yard specifically for your needs and values. Below are some of the basic factors for homeowners to consider before starting or updating landscaping and use of their yards.

Do a Site Assessment

- who will be using the space – age, lifestyles, pets
- what can your space and soil offer to plants
- make a detail site map including traffic patterns, both vehicular and paths, slopes, wind, noise, view, north and south, space between buildings and fences
- are there wildlife, rock outcroppings, native plants, or established trees and large shrubs
What is Important to You?

- what are your likes and dislikes for open space; a closed in feeling; shade; scents; sounds
- what time of day will each group use the space – early mornings, evenings and weekends for
  the adults; after school and weekends for the teens and children
- which are your most important activity needs – active space for children; for adult entertaining;
  for solitude; all of these
- what seasons of the year are most important for your activities
- list strategies – do you want to hide or frame a view; define a space; create mystery; change
  elevations; create year round interest
- how much time will it take to maintain the space; who will do the maintenance; and when

Make a Wish List

- Have everyone acknowledge they may not get everything listed. We all have time, money,
  space, and practicality constraints.
- what is your dream space
- take photos or cut out magazine pictures of spaces that you find attractive
- go on a family outing and visit botanical gardens in Phoenix or Las Vegas
- list each persons activities – relaxing; playing games; growing fresh veggies; flower gardening;
  yoga; a snooze in the sun or shade for the dog; playing catch; using a putting green; smelling
  the roses
- is there something you want to remove, replace, or hide

Ecological Factors to Consider

- save energy by using trees to shade your home or play areas; bushes to minimize reflected
  summer heat or to shade air-conditioning units; or limit winter winds by using walls, fences, or
  plantings
· save water by going native, using organic mulches, grouping plants by water needs

· create areas for water harvesting with gutters, berms, swales, retention basins or use of semi-permeable hardscape. One idea is the use of bricks over sand for patios or sidewalks, which allows rainfall to permeate to provide water to nearby trees and shrubs

· use organic fertilizers or pesticides

Safety Factors to Consider

· provide a line of sight along pathways

· limit obstructions, such as not planting trees under power lines, nor planting shrubs that will overgrow pathways

· define areas in your yard with hedges, pathways, or planting beds to identify where people should or should not be. For example, a heavy planting of prickly plants under windows could prevent break-ins.

· use fire resistant landscaping; and in rural areas maintain a 30-foot perimeter for trees and shrubs

Functionality Factors

· reduce/reuse/recycle – some of the most interesting gardens and patios reuse articles from prior eras. I recently saw a gazebo/sitting bench made from two old doors and a wooden ladder with vines growing over the top. It made a cozy spot for early morning coffee, or for a shady afternoon place to read.

· if you are building a house, consider the use of greywater for some of your landscaping [yes, it is now legal in Arizona if you follow the Health Dept guidelines.] For a brochure see http://cals.arizona.edu/mohave/water/landscaping.html or obtain a copy at the University of Arizona Mohave Cooperative Extension office at 101 East Beale Street, Kingman.

· consider width of gates and pathways for use of wheelbarrows or carts
· plan cooking and eating areas in conjunction with indoor kitchen access
· consider multi-purpose plantings, for example, a hedge suitable for wildlife habitat
· consider planting edible landscaping, such as fruit trees, grape vines, herbs, and vegetables. Asparagus grows well here, and makes a beautiful fern backdrop for a bed of summer flowers.

**Beauty Factors**

· repeat themes of materials, color, texture, lines or curves; use the same themes when going through gates or under canopies – if you use brick for a patio, continue the brick theme by using brick to outline a concrete sidewalk
· plan for multiples in odd numbers, such as one or three trees, five shrubs or clumps of grass. Multiples of more than seven can be even or odd, as the eye apparently doesn't quickly count that many.
· consider proportion and balance – if you use heavy walls, then use heavy trees, and heavy furniture
· consider simplicity if that is your style – a single tree against a colored wall can be dramatic
· consider walls instead of hedges; gravel mulch or patio areas instead of large expanses of lawn
· consider lush plantings in very small spaces
· use pathways to lead to something interesting; use lines to guide the viewers eye to an item of interest
· use lights to highlight garden features after dark

**Planning Factors**

· draw a plan of your yard, showing any existing buildings, walls, and plants that will remain
· use several tissue or other see thru paper as practice overlays to draw in general areas of proposed activities
· develop a budget – a several year plan is not unreasonable
· develop a schedule of events
· it is usually better to build the hardscape first – the walls, walkways, and patios. It is easier to put in a patio if you don’t have to work around the tree you planted two weeks ago.
· research the characteristics of the major plants you plan to buy. You need to know their ultimate size, water needs, and temperature extremes, as well as if they are deciduous or evergreen and leaf litter.
· try to schedule planting trees and large shrubs in September. As our desert weather begins to cool, these plants concentrate on root growth thru the fall and winter. This will give them a head start for next spring.

Whew, there certainly are many basic factors to consider. Before buying plants and digging holes, please use them as a guide to help plan your yard for your specific needs.

For more information contact The University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension at 101 E. Beale Street, Suite A, Kingman or telephone 928-753-3788.

CONTACT: ROB GRUMBLES
Extension Agent, Agriculture
The University of Arizona
Mohave County Cooperative Extension
101 E Beale Street, Suite A
Kingman AZ 86401-5808
928 753-3788 / 928 753-1665 (f)
mohavece@cals.arizona.edu