



Johnson's Garden Talk

Newsletter archives ... for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

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The Landscape Design Process

Mark Dayton, Johnson's Landscape Designer

I was looking at my yard the other day thinking (or should I say dreaming) of what it could look like some day. I haven't lived here long and like some new homeowners, I have had to set my landscaping on the back burner for a while ... so to speak. But now I'm finally ready to start cooking!

I can envision a nice river birch near the deck providing cooling shade in the summer. I can see a bubbling brook winding through the back yard ending in a crystal clear pond. I see groupings of colorful shrubs along the front of my house fronted by even more colorful annual flowers. I could sure use a screen for privacy along the back yard fence. What about a vegetable garden? That sounds kind of fun, too. I've got lots of ideas but where do I go from here? It's time to start working on a plan!

As a landscape designer, I use three basic steps when drawing a landscape plan. These three steps are: create a site analysis, draw the preliminary plan, and draw the final plan.

A site analysis is the process of taking an inventory of the existing elements on the site. I prefer to measure and draw the site to scale on a piece of graph paper. I first measure and draw the house, making sure I note window and door placement and window heights. I also measure and draw in driveways, sidewalks, air conditioner pads, water faucets, lampposts, utility boxes, existing plants, sheds, and any other items that may be present. Using this newly generated base plan, I then note important views from windows or decks, views to screen, areas of sun and shade, water drainage, overhead utility lines and windy areas to name a few. After creating a site analysis, I can then start thinking about the preliminary design.

The preliminary design is the "brain storming" process. This is the time to start making lists of ideas. It helps to ask yourself some questions and write down the answers. These questions may include the following: What colors do I like? What plants do I like? What plants do I not like? Do I want boulders? What about statuary? What about a trellis or arbor? Do I need shade anywhere? What about the dog? He needs a place to live. Do I want big shade trees? Do I want a full landscape or something more simple and spaced out? Do I have time to maintain large numbers of plants or should I limit the number of shrub beds? How much money am I willing to spend on my landscape? Etc., etc., ... you get the picture. These are questions I like to ask homeowners so that I can get a "feel" for what they want, need and expect in a design.

After creating the list of ideas it is time to start drawing the preliminary plan. I like to redraw the base plan I created when making the site analysis. Using a copy of the base plan, I rough sketch a basic landscape plan by drawing in bed shapes, tree placement, patio shapes, plant selection, pond locations, etc., always keeping in mind and incorporating the list of ideas.

It is important to use the fundamental design principles of order, unity, and rhythm when creating the preliminary plan. After getting a rough idea of how the plan will be

arranged, I can start on the final plan.

The final plan is the culmination of the site analysis and the preliminary plan process. It is critical that the final plan be drawn as a "working plan." In other words, the final plan must be drawn so that all elements are perfectly to scale so that the actual landscape will grow and mature just as it is drawn on paper. I also label all the elements in the design as to what they are for easy reference.

I'd like to stress that the landscape design process is quite simple, although the actual use of design principles in creating a plan is quite complicated. Landscape design is an art form and takes natural ability and a thorough understanding of design principles to be achieved properly. If you are the artistic type and know your plants, go ahead and try to develop your own landscape plan. If not, don't sweat it. We are always here to help.