

Turn your “hell strip” into something heavenly

Gardening in the Parkway



Ah. The parkway . . . that area between the sidewalk and the street . . . or, if there’s no sidewalk, between your property line and the street . . . the public property that **you** usually have to maintain.

Why garden in the parkway?

► *It’s a challenging microclimate*

The parkway, depending on the age of the neighborhood, can be in full sun or full shade, and the soil is usually poor and dry. There may be buried construction rubble or an accumulation of road chemicals in the soil.

► *You can usually see it from your window*

In typical residential landscape designs, foundation plantings are primarily for the benefit of the passerby. The homeowner rarely sees them (unless they become overgrown and block the windows—and many do). Wouldn’t it be nice to look at something pretty?

Meet the neighbors

When you garden in the front yard, and especially in the parkway, you can’t help but meet people who pass by. Because they are unusual, parkway gardens can be a means of “breaking the ice” with new (or even old) neighbors. You may meet gardening friends you never knew existed.

You’ve run out of space elsewhere

If your other beds have expanded over the years, the parkway may be, to borrow a term from that 1960’s sci-fi series, your “final frontier.”

► *Your yard looks bigger*

A parkway garden can make a small front yard look bigger, especially if you repeat plants, colors and textures in the parkway that are found in other parts of your garden.

► *Slows down the traffic*

Parkway gardens are unusual. Once you have one, you’ll notice cars slowing down so their occupants

can get a closer look. You may see the same cars circling the block and coming back to your parkway garden a second or third time. You may even see—are you sitting down?—people actually getting out of their cars to look closer at the plants.

► *Encourages others to garden*

Many gardeners who have started gardening in the parkway report that after the parkway garden appears on the block, neighbors seem to catch the bug and either start new beds or expand existing ones.

Important considerations

► *It can be a design challenge*

Not all gardeners are comfortable working with long narrow beds. It’s also a challenge to incorporate plants that will provide a nice color show for the full growing season.

► *Frequently terrible soil*

Of all the soil in your yard, the soil in the parkway will be the worst. It started out being compacted by construction equipment. It is subject to being driven on by delivery trucks and wayward teenagers. There may be little or no organic matter in the soil, but there will be lots of road chemicals (gasoline, oil, salt).

► *Requires frequent watering*

If your parkway is in a sunny location, it will be surrounded by hot asphalt or concrete (or both). In older neighborhoods with large trees, the tree roots will suck the soil dry in no time. Fortunately, parkway beds are ideal candidates for soaker hoses. Lay a hose up one side and down the other. Use a quick-connect attachment to connect the garden hose to the soaker hose.

► *Very (as in very) public*

A parkway garden is not one you can let go, or the neighbors really *will* start to talk. The parkway garden is like a welcome mat. Make sure it is always presentable. Choose low-maintenance plants that don't require a lot of pruning or deadheading.

► *Safety*

Call **1-800-DIG-SAFE** before you do anything.
(Can also call 811)

Many cities now bury utility lines (phone, gas, water, electricity), so it is **crucial** that you make this call. Even if the lines are deep enough not to be a concern when digging, you need to be aware of them in case future repair work (that means digging) becomes necessary. Don't plant anything over utility lines that cannot be easily moved.

► *Municipal code restrictions*

Most cities are particular when it comes to the trees you plant in the parkway, but most do not care about the flowers you plant. If you live on a corner lot, you'll need to find out about height restrictions in an area called the "site-distance" triangle (an area 20 to 30 feet back from the corner in which tall plants would block the view of oncoming traffic). Call your city planner or code enforcement office to see if your city restricts parkway gardens.

► *Homeowners' association restrictions*

If you live in a subdivision with a homeowners' association, contact them to see if there are any neighborhood restrictions.

Planning Tips

► *Do a scale drawing*

Even if you don't normally draw your garden plans, draw this one. Most parkways are simply long rectangles, so they're very easy to measure and get down on paper. A scale drawing will not only help you calculate the number of plants, but with some colored pencils or crayons, it'll help you plan for continuous bloom. Here's a challenge: Why not design a parkway that's pink and blue in the spring, white in the summer, and yellow in the fall?

► *Plan for traffic*

Consider stepping stones or short mulched paths for the people who will undoubtedly cut through your parkway (for example, getting out of their cars). If your parkway is a long one, you may want to make it easy on the gardener and include some stepping stones for cutting across to the other side.

► *Informal is easier than formal*

Resist the temptation to plant a solid line of anything around the perimeter of the parkway. Invariably, one or two of the plants won't make it, leaving you with the "missing tooth" effect. Curves work better than straight lines and are more interesting to the eye. Since the parkway bed is narrow, you can relax on the "put the tall stuff in the back" rule. Have fun!

► *Strive for a three-season show*

Incorporate spring, summer, and fall blooming plants. For example, daffodils, iris, peonies, daylilies, coneflowers and asters provide an uninterrupted display of flowers from April to October.

► *Include herbs, rock garden plants, natives, invasives*

Herbs and rock garden plants like hot, dry growing conditions, which is the definition of a parkway. The parkway is also a perfect place for containing plants that like to roam. Think of it as a bed with a 4-foot concrete border. If you like mint, but hesitate to grow it in other beds, consider the parkway. It'll fill in nicely and, when it flowers, mint is a wonderful butterfly plant.

What NOT to plant

► *Plants that require "moist, well-drained" soil*

This is the parkway, remember?

► *Extremely valuable plants*

Do not put valuable plants (or plants that have sentimental value) in your parkway garden. You never know when the snowplow might come along and scrape your plants away like frost off a windshield. Instead, use tough, drought-tolerant, low-maintenance plants (read on for suggested perennials and annuals).

Plants that do well in a full-sun parkway

Perennials

Common Name	Botanical Name
Aromatic Aster	<i>Aster oblongifolius</i>
Basket-of-Gold Alyssum	<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i>
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia grandiflora</i>
Blue Flax	<i>Flax linum</i>
Bronze Fennel	<i>Foeniculum vulgare pur-</i>
Candytuft	<i>Iberis sempervirens</i>
Catmint	<i>Nepeta faassenii</i>
Chameleon Plant	<i>Houttuynia cordata</i>
Creeping Phlox	<i>Phlox subulata</i>
Daylily	<i>Hemerocallis hyb.</i>
Drumstick Allium	<i>Allium sphaerocephalon</i>
Garden Mum	<i>Chrysanthemum hyb.</i>
Gaura	<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i>
Germander	<i>Teucrium chamaedrys</i>
Golden Oregano	<i>Origanum vulgare aureum</i>
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago hyb.</i>
Groundcover Rose	<i>Rosa hyb.</i>

Common Name	Botanical Name
Lamb's Ear	<i>Stachys byzantina</i>
Lavender	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>
Leadwort	<i>Ceratostigma plumbagi-noides</i>
Lilyturf	<i>Liriope spicata</i>
Mexican Hat	<i>Ratibida columnaris</i>
Mint	<i>Mentha whatever</i>
Missouri Primrose	<i>Oenothera missouriensis</i>
Oriental Lily	<i>Lilium orientalis</i>
Penstemon	<i>Penstemon digitalis 'Husker Red'</i>
Peony (herbaceous)	<i>Paeonia lactiflora</i>
Purple Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Sedum	<i>Sedum spectabile</i>
Siberian Iris	<i>Iris siberica</i>
Snow-in-Summer	<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>
St. Johnswort	<i>Hypericum calycinum</i>
Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>
Variegated Ribbon Grass	<i>Phalaris arundinacea picta</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea filipendula</i>

Annuals

Common Name	Botanical Name
Cockscomb	<i>Celosia cristata</i>
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i>
Dahlberg Daisy	<i>Dyssodia tenuiloba</i>
Four O'Clocks	<i>Mirabilis jalapa</i>
Gazania	<i>Gazania rigens</i>
Globe Amaranth	<i>Gomphrena globosa</i>

Common Name	Botanical Name
Melampodium	<i>Melampodium paludosum</i>
Mexican Sunflower	<i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i>
Moss Rose	<i>Portulaca grandiflora</i>
Vinca	<i>Catharanthus roseus</i>
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia angustifolia</i>
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia elegans</i>

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Johnson County

Extension Master Gardener Hotline

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