

Renovating the Landscape



Landscape redesign can be a very rewarding but daunting task. There are many reasons why you may want to renovate your landscape.

- You may have purchased a home that had very little landscaping, poorly maintained gardens, or overgrown and crowded landscapes. Even newly constructed homes may have been planted with poor quality plants or overplanted
- As a family grows or children leave, your needs change; therefore, your outdoor living environment sometimes changes.
- Perhaps for health reasons or physical limitations you may wish to downsize your garden and lawn or design a low maintenance landscape.

Regardless of the reason, the process for a successful landscape renovation is the same.

Step 1 **Divide so you can conquer.**

The first step is to divide the property into sectors: the front, the back, and sides right and left. If one area is large, for example the backyard, you may want to divide it into sub-sectors. As you analyze your yard sector by sector, you will find the job less intimidating. Keep in mind what your goals and needs are and why you are renovating the landscape.

Step 2 **Evaluate.**

The next step is to assess what you currently have in each sector, both hardscapes and plants, then decide what is worth keeping. Changing hardscape elements usually requires more labor and expense. Hardscapes include fences and gates, sidewalks and paths, patios and decks, retaining walls, arbors, potting sheds, gazebos, outdoor seating, etc. Determine if each hardscape element should be replaced, removed or if any should be added.

Step 3 **Decide what to keep, move, or throw.**

Next, examine each individual plant, shrub, and tree within each sector. As Sara Jane Von Trapp advises in her book *The Landscape Makeover Book*, place them into one of three categories: **keepers**, **movers** or **composters**.

- **Keepers** — A keeper plant is healthy, free of insects and disease, has been well maintained, and is in the right location. Additionally, the flower color fits well with the rest of the color scheme in that section.
- **Movers** — Movers are healthy plants that need to be moved. Perhaps they would enhance the garden in another location, need more or less sun or need more room to grow.

- Composters — Composters are plants that are dying or dead or are overgrown plants you do not want to prune. Composters may also be healthy plants prone to disease or insects, or a shrub or evergreen that has been improperly pruned or damaged by ice or wind storms and may take years to recover.

Sometimes composters are plants that you don't want or like anymore, no longer fit your landscape ideas or are plants you have too many of. Instead of adding these to the compost pile, offer them to your neighbors and friends. They will love you!

A word of caution: Do not put diseased or insect-damage plants in your compost pile. They will infest the compost pile.

Step 4 Analyze your plants.

When analyzing plants, look also at the big picture. Take pictures of the different areas, every season if possible and study the groupings. Critique them to see how the shapes, colors and textures fit together. Consider the following:

- Are they crowded or are there gaps?
- Are there too many or not enough focal points?
- Do the plants offer enough color and interest?
- Is there a mix of evergreen, deciduous, woody and herbaceous plants?
- Are there any plants that are out of proportion — either too big or too small — with the house or with other plants in the immediate landscape?
- Are any plants overgrown and blocking windows, doors or pathways?
- Are there too many or not enough trees?
- Are trees planted too close to the house or utility lines?

Step 5 Look at the structure of the garden.

The structure of a landscape is just as important as the plants and helps define the garden. Structure includes trees, evergreens and shrubs. The structure is best viewed in winter when there is little foliage on the plants.

Step 6 Design your new landscape.

When you have thoroughly examined the current landscape and determined your goals, you are ready to design your new landscape. Developing a plan, budget and schedule are essential. A complete renovation is difficult to finish in one year, especially if you are doing the work yourself. *But the time and effort are definitely worth it!* A well-designed and maintained landscape will add value to your property and give you pride for years to come, as well as providing you with a relaxing, enjoyable outdoor environment.