

Printed July 19, 2024



The harmonious shapes of Allium 'Serendipity' and Feverfew 'Sunny Ball' are calming, yet the contrasting colors provide a touch of excitement

Designing Your Yard - Part 2: Design Considerations

By Cathy Slavin

Hopefully, you have found time to comb through some books and websites and have taken advantage of the opportunity to visit some gardens to help decide what you want and don't want in your garden. Here are a few things I've learned along the way (sometimes the hard way) to help you get to a pleasing design.

- First and foremost, you'll want to determine how you want to use your yard. Do you need a lawn for play? A place for a vegetable garden? Seating or eating spaces? Do you have an existing deck or patio or want to build one? Make a list of your needs.
- Keep the style of your home in mind. You'll want your landscape to reflect it or at least not conflict with it.
- Are there mechanicals or areas that you want to screen? Do you need privacy screening? Trees, mixed tree/shrub borders, hedges or fences can all help accomplish this.
- Conversely, are there views beyond your property lines that you can "borrow," such as lovely trees, park vistas or wooded areas? Water views abound in Falmouth, even when your own property is not waterfront.
- Consider ecological impacts. Do you really want a large lawn that requires irrigation and chemicals to look good or would a wildflower meadow work? Should you consider drought tolerant plants to reduce water usage? Or perhaps your ideal is a garden filled with native plants. Natives are uniquely adapted to grow successfully in our area and they provide food sources, habitat and breeding spots for our native wildlife and pollinators. Many of them are also lovely landscape plants.
- How much maintenance are you willing to do? Should you opt for easy-care shrubs and groundcovers (which can also be beautiful) or are you willing to put in more effort on maintenance?
- When marking out planting beds around a lawn, I've found that shaping the lawn the way you want it and letting the planting beds fall into place around it provides a more pleasing result than trying to decide where the beds should go first.
- The universal elements of design also play a role in garden design:
 - You can create a more interesting yard by varying foliage **textures** and paying attention to **scale**. The huge chartreuse leaves of a hosta look striking when contrasted with a frilly deep purple heuchera, the grassy texture of a carex or the laciness of a fern.
 - Employing **repetition** along a border by repeating plants or colors periodically can also be quite pleasing.
 - And **color**! Plants provide a veritable artist's palette of color and shape (both foliage and flowers) that you can use to create your own masterpiece.
- Speaking of art, you can employ structures, fountains, walls, fences, garden art and other elements to bring your yard to the next level.
- Vertical accents can act like exclamation marks in the garden and add excitement.
- Even in a small yard, it's interesting to create transitions from one area to another so the garden is not all revealed at once and has a sense of mystery. A vine covered arbor, a pair of flanking evergreens, gates or a narrowing pathway all work.
- You can add interest by creating vistas and vignettes. Place garden art, a stately potted plant or a structure such as a trellis at the end of a long view. Find ways to make raised vegetable beds or a utilitarian garden shed a feature.

Have fun with this step (my favorite!) and be sure to add your own personality with signature touches that are yours alone, be it a colorful shed door, a unique paving material or a handmade obelisk or garden ornament.