

gardening



PHOTOS AND STORY BY MELANIE REKOLA

Design a Beautiful ECO-CHIC GARDEN

With the environment at the forefront of many of our home and lifestyle choices, often people are turning to the trend of “sustainable landscaping.” By following four basic steps, you can easily revamp your existing garden or begin a brand new garden of your dreams.

An eco-chic garden is one that uses no chemical pesticide, herbicide or fungicide. They are informal gardens and usually consist of small trees, many shrubs and a few long-blooming perennials. Though these gardens do bloom, they are much more dependent on form and foliage than more traditional flower gardens. The trade off is, with careful planning, your landscape will look beautiful year round and not just when in flower.

Sustainable landscapes generally contain drought-tolerant plants with some native varieties, need only a yearly pruning, very little watering and only occasional weeding and dead-heading. They depend on healthy soil, careful plant choices and a thick layer of mulch to retard weed growth and keep moisture in.



THE FOUR FS OF GARDEN DESIGN

Function, Form, Foliage and Flower

Before you begin choosing plant material for your garden oasis, always consider “The Four Fs of Garden Design.” The four Fs are placed in order of importance: Function, Form, Foliage and Flower.

The function of your plant choices will ensure their survival. Know your hardiness zone, light, moisture and soil conditions.

Great landscapes often have a lot of contrast within their form and foliage categories. With each plant selection, try to get lots of colour, even just from foliage. You may not always attain all four of the categories in each plant selection, but if your choice gets three out of four, you’ve picked well.

STEP 1 – Choosing trees and evergreens

Trees and evergreens are the starting point of any great landscape. To begin, try to look at your landscape with fresh eyes, or ask a trusted friend. We all become complacent to eyesores outside our homes. Are there views to screen, or views to highlight? Trees can both screen and highlight specific areas and there are many smaller ornamental varieties available to fit into any space.

Trees and evergreens create the “bones” of your garden and are a must for winter interest. Evergreen shrubs also add needed textural elements year-round that aren’t available in deciduous plant material. Look for varieties with various shades of green, blue and gold.

STEP 2 – Flowering shrubs and ornamental grasses

The next step is to choose your shrubs and substantial grasses. There are so many beautiful shrub varieties, many with gorgeous foliage and flower. Almost any landscape has room for drought-tolerant Hydrangea varieties. Dwarf Korean Lilacs are also very useable for their smaller bushy habit, unlike the gangly old-fashion type that many people are familiar with. Try to pick shrubs with purple or golden leaves as well.

Ornamental grasses are trendy and perfect for sunny situations where a vertical element is needed, but not a lot of space is available. They also add wonderful movement and a substantial-but-fine-textured element to the landscape. Depending on your space, try to plant shrubs and ornamental grasses in groupings of three, five or more.

STEP 3 – Picking perennials

When picking perennials, look for tidy, clump-forming and long-blooming cultivars. Try to plant perennials “en masse” and don’t pick a plant solely for its beautiful flower! I am partial to daylilies for their wide variety of colourful blooms, as well as their strappy, grass-like foliage. The repeat blooming varieties can flower for a total of six weeks. I also love the whole sedum family for its succulent foliage and abundant flower. Both these perennials are tough and drought-tolerant, plus they provide food for the pollinators that are vital to the health of our environment.

TRENDY EDIBLES

Within each of these categories you could choose edibles and grow some of your own food. From beautiful beans on vines, to fruiting trees and shrubs, to a gourmet herb garden, edibles are both an appropriate and beautiful choice for any property. It is the cumulative effect of all of these small choices that will make a long-term difference to our planet and how we view it. Best of luck and happy gardening! **OH**

