



EARTHWORKS
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS & CONTRACTORS, INC.

How to Create Your New American Garden

Start with a Want/Needs List

Start by listing your garden/landscaping wants and needs. Do you want the style to be natural and relaxed, or more formal? Need a space for play equipment? – A place for vegetable gardening? List all your functional needs so they can be sited correctly in your new garden. List all the plants you like. Do you need to screen out an objectionable view? Think about maintenance – will you spend time in the garden, or do you go to the cabin every weekend? Looking through gardening books and magazines can help here. Give your imagination and creative spirit free rein at this stage. Here are some additional wish list items to help you get started:

1. Flower beds with a variety of plan
2. Decks or patios for entertaining
3. Water feature (water pond/stream, swimming pool)
4. Storage for sports or garden equipment
5. Irrigation systems
6. Outdoor lighting
7. Privacy from neighbors or a busy street
8. Protection from wind or sun
9. Increased parking for family and guests
10. Attracting wildlife
11. Dog kennel
12. Improve circulation patterns
13. Site outdoor art
14. Improve soil
15. Solve drainage problem

Calculate Your Budget

Before you start, (whether hiring professional help or doing it yourself) it's best to determine how much you want – and can afford – to invest in your landscape. Some experts think a good place to start is to use 5% of the value of your home as your budget number. Remember that you don't have to do the entire plan at once, and that several recent studies have shown that landscaping has a recovery value of at least 100% if it is well done. Use this formula as a starting point and adjust up or down depending on your situation.

Do a Base Map

Using a scale of $1/8" = 1' - 0"$, or $1/4" = 1' - 0"$ (graph paper in these scales works well), draw a map of your site, showing property lines and the location of main features (house, driveway and sidewalks, trees, shrubs, fences, etc.). Check local zoning and building regulations. If you live in a development, check to see if there are any covenants that you have to follow. Be sure to show the location and sizes of all windows and doors that open to the garden – the indoor/outdoor aspect of your garden is important. Try and be accurate, and remember to locate water spigots, downspouts, and all vents.

Site Analysis

With a notebook and camera in hand, slowly walk your site and note existing natural and built features that might help or hinder your new garden – don't be afraid to think about removing certain things – “editing” is a powerful design tool. Check your soil type by digging a few small holes at various spots on your site – is it sandy and well drained or heavy clay, which will stay moist longer. For even better soil information, have it tested by a soils laboratory. Identify any problems, like poor drainage, steep slopes, settled/sunken areas, etc. Put a North arrow on your map and note areas of sun, shade and wind. Look for off-site views or scenery that can be “borrowed” visually – and also check for unwanted views that can be screened out. Be sure and check the views from inside the house too. If you can, take photos – they'll come in real handy during the drawing/planning stage. Identify existing plants that will stay and those that have to go. Write down any ideas, impressions, or “hunches” that pop into your head as you walk the site – some of them will help later. Remember to think in “volume” – your garden is an outdoor “space” that has height, length, and depth – an outdoor room that has walls, a ceiling, and a floor – creating a sense of enclosure can have dramatic effects. Focus on spatial experience – consider the house as a sheltered part of the garden – and that, (the garden) in turn, as a part of a larger landscape.

Start Drawing

Tape your base map to a flat surface, and over-lay it with tracing paper. Next, set out your photos, the wants and needs list, and your site analysis notes. Start by making a number of alternative general area sketches, fitting the use areas together in ways that take into account site features and family needs. Use circles, ovals, and rectangles to locate specific spaces in your plan. As you draw, refer back to your photos and notes to make sure your proposed use areas “fit” where you want to put them on your site. Don't be afraid to walk the site again with notebook in hand, visualizing some of the elements that you're thinking about using in your plan. Remember that your job as a garden designer is to plan a garden in two dimensions (a drawing), which will exist in three dimensions – height, length, and depth. Use plant masses and built elements to create some areas of enclosure, making “outdoor rooms” that have walls, a ceiling, and a floor. Play with the relationship between the positive and the negative elements – the solid and the void, materials and space. Remember, too that unity, balance, line, shape, form, texture, scale, pattern, color, and contrast are part of the designer's “bag of tricks”. If you have time, do the plan over several days or weeks – let your subconscious help out. Distill your many drawings into one schematic. Next, re-draw to scale, using straight edges, etc. Draw your “hardscape” areas now – patios, walkways, decks, etc. Take a tape measure outside and check to see if the sizes of your hardscape areas seem comfortable, and “fit” where you're proposing to put them. It is time now to select plant species

matching plant's cultural requirements to your site situations and drawing them full size to avoid over-crowding later. It helps to have a plant selection guide, or nursery catalogs at this point to look up plants ultimate sizes and their cultural requirements. Resist the temptation to forget about time (landscaping's fourth dimension). Plants will grow to their mature size, so it's important to size them correctly to your site/situation. Keep an eraser handy, and keep drawing and revising until you get it "right", then make a final drawing. Make several working copies of the final drawing, and file the original. Finally, don't be afraid to make adjustments and changes when you actually install your garden, or you can forget all this stuff and hire Earthworks to do the whole deal!