

A Gardener's Crystal Ball: Visualizing Changes to the Garden or Landscape

I. Step one: Mess with your "focus."

A. Blur out the details as you look at what you have.

1. Soften the edges and lose the individual items' details and identities.
 - Squint, spin the lens, put not-quite-clear plastic over the window...
2. Are you starting with a blank slate, and thinking "no details to blur?"
 - Be glad; many people envy you, then
 - Keep an open mind, and
 - Blur the focus on distracting and unattractive elements.

B. Pick out basic focal points and focal point groups in a scene.

1. Focal point is a space/item that stops your eye. (Bare slate: Pick a spot!)
 - Tall, bright items are naturals.
 - Yet anything that stands out can draw the eye:
 - Shape
 - Texture
 - Color (beyond flower)
 - Repeated element
 - Striking balance
 - Sometimes no clear point, or constant shift. Baseline organization missing.
2. Focal point group is the focal point plus its "frame."
 - Frame: Significant contrasting surround, underline, or backdrop.
 - Blank slate? Focus, determine comfortable size (#3 below).
3. Determine the size of a comfortable focal point or focal point group.
 - Judge this from a main viewer location. (Where you most often stand/sit.)
 - Look at the focal point. (Bare slate: Start with *others'* scenes, or photos.)
 - Note how much space left-right is in focus *without eye-shift or head-turn*.
 - Focal point/group should fit in that space, for that viewer.
 - Often too small/too many in a scene, or fail to relate to one another. Busy.

C. Focus on your purpose. Use descriptive, non-plant terms.

1. Height, shape, width, color, seasonality.
2. Function.
3. Example today: Year-round interest. (Many more reasons exist!)

II. Step two: Allow the possibility of all change, even "erasures" and moves.

A. Ah, so hard to let go!

B. Assess the health and potential of "keeper" plants.

1. Species.
2. Health.
3. Location (location, location).

III. Step three: Visualize *space* and a change.

Here's where a blank slate is an asset.

A. Simplest method is on paper.

1. Makes erasure and move so much easier.
2. You'll need:
 - Take a photo (from main view point, entire focal point area.)
 - Make a large print (photo lab, scanner & computer, copy & enlarge)
 - Tracing paper & pencil
 - Copier
3. Trace the scene's main lines.
4. Copy the tracing.
5. Experiment with adding new focal point lines/items.
 - No need for realism. Shape, size, placement is what counts.
 - Make moves.
 - Clip or copy and combine elements.

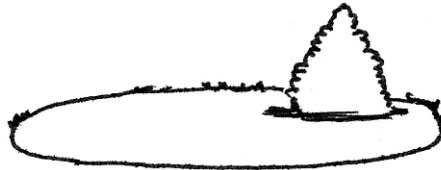


B. More techniques: Photos & scissors, flags and models

1. Cut from photos of attractive scenes, place on photo of your yard.
2. Flag the site to help you focus.
3. Use models: Clay, cardboard cut-outs, etc..

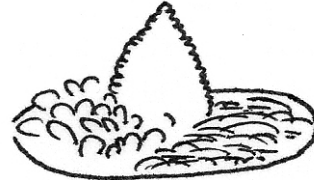
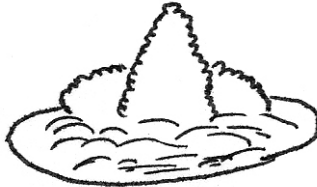
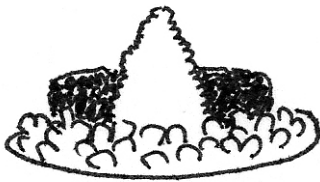
C. Pick and fill, or fill a focal point

1. First be comfortable with placement.
 - Placement of the focal point establishes a balance.
 - Centered focal point sets a formal tone.
 - Off center, fosters asymmetrical balance and informality.



2. Fill the spot

- With just one item, or...
- ...focal point group of star and frame.
 - Go for contrast between star and frame. Subtle or bold.
 - Frame, too has formal or informal balance, and "feel."
 - One or more frames, like matte-ing and then framing a photo.



3. It's a conscious choice to plan it more or less full -- space is nice!

4. Still no need for realism or specific plant names, flower color.

- Think in notable characteristics: Shape, texture, overall enduring color.



D. Now is the time.

1. Late fall or early spring, when full plates can appear as bare slates.

IV. Step four: Find plants or features to fill your vision.

A. Plants.

1. Many (too many?) resources:
 - Books that specify habit, mature size and growth rate.
 - Knowledgeable friends (On-line forums, as www.practicalgardening.com.)
 - Drive around town, parks, botanical gardens, arboretums
2. Find the candidate's scientific name. No need to pronounce it, just write it.
3. Can't find a plant?
 - Did you lose track of the basic descriptive words?
 - Don't rule out non-plant.
 - Tropicals, woodies, perennials...
...limitless possibilities; simply must match your descriptive words.



B. Non-plant features.

1. Path has place, width, shape, texture, color.
2. Arbors, backdrops, screens have place, height, width, shape, color, texture.
3. Containers have shape, color, size.
4. Sculpture has shape, color, size, texture.
5. Water feature has size, texture, shape.
6. Various materials have varying "life span" and suitability for a site.

C. "Ask" the following questions of each candidate and start over with a new possibility if answer is "No."

1. Will this **thrive on the site, last on the site?**
2. Do I/we have the time, ability and experience to care for this?
3. Can I afford this? Will it look the part "in time"?
4. Does this fulfill one of my purposes from step one?

V. Step five: Make the change!

A. Determine how many of each chosen item it will take to fill the selected spaces.

B. Plant, construct!

C. Draw an outline around what you've planted, added.

D. Still can't "Erase" existing plants, features?

- Add what you can...
- ...ease into the rest.
- You know where you're going, what it will look like in the end!