

Inviting Landscape

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Creating a sense of order

An inviting landscape maximizes and optimizes our sensory experience when we enter the outdoor space and interact with its surroundings. It evokes positive emotion and makes us feel invigorated from the experience.

This is the portion of the landscape design that focuses on aesthetic values. To make the landscape inviting, we need to address landscape elements and apply design principles.

The landscape elements include line/form, texture/color, light/noise and view/privacy. These elements are organized and appointed according to needs and design principles.

The important design principles include contrast/similarity, scale/proportion, rhythm/repetition, space/enclosure, layering/sequencing, dominance/emphasis, balance/harmony and order/unity.

An inviting landscape will have few strong lines. Curvilinear lines are more natural; they allow the eye to slow down to enjoy the landscape in a more relaxed and inviting way.

Most manmade landscape-design themes are strongly related to two fundamental forms: circle and square. Repetition of similar forms in the landscape can make it more harmonious and inviting.

Texture refers to how fine, coarse, bold or rough a surface is. It adds interest and varieties. Coarse texture dominates and attracts the eye, while fine texture unifies and exaggerates the distance. A combination of coarse and fine texture in close sequence can be inviting.

Color is the reflection of light waves from an object. There are twelve basic colors on the color wheel. Three are primary colors: yellow, red and blue. Mixing any two primary colors creates three secondary colors: green, orange and violet.

Complimentary colors are on opposite sides of the color wheel, such as yellow and violet, blue and orange and red and green. When the complementary colors are placed next to each other, they intensify each other and the contrast is pleasing to the eye.

On the other hand, analogous colors are within 3-to-5 adjacent hues on the color wheel; they share a common color. Combinations like red, red-orange, orange-red and orange create similarity and harmony.

A monochromatic color scheme offers a soothing effect by employing only one hue and combining tints, shade and tones of that color.



Color and texture contrast in an inviting wedding garden. *Photo by Everett Chu / WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners.*

Light quality is a landscape element that affects the plant health as well as the overall aesthetic results. Degree of shade, time of day, and season all come into play in a design.

The noise from a nearby highway is typically an unfavorable landscape element to address, whereas the sound of water from a stream or water feature is usually more desirable and inviting.

The view is what a person sees or doesn't see from a particular point within a space. The most significant views, from the vantage points, should be the focus in design, including panoramic, concentrated, and blocked view. On the opposite spectrum, a sense of privacy and security from blocked views contributes significantly to the positive experience and should be addressed with a higher priority.

Proportion is the size relationship between the features of the landscape, vertically and horizontally. Scale is the absolute proportion in relation to an object. In an inviting landscape, few things should be out of proportion.



Left: Layering and sequencing in an inviting landscape enclosure. **Right:** Repetition and rhythm in an inviting entryway garden. *Photos by Everett Chu / WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners.*

Every well-designed landscape area should have a prominent, dominant element in its composition. Such strong emphasis (focal points of sculpture, furniture, planter or plants) contrasts with adjacent elements, draws the viewer's eye first and establishes a sense of unity by common subordination.

Repetition is a good technique to simplify and unify the landscape. When landscape features, including planting, repeat enough times with certain interval between repetitions, a rhythm is established within the user's experience. This experience can be further strengthened when time and movement are involved, such as when walking a trail or driving on a long driveway.

Landscape space should be developed as gardens of many rooms. Enclosure for the rooms would confine the eyesight and promote a sense of shelter making the space more inviting.

Landscape planting can be more appealing when it is done in layers, both vertically and horizontally. The gradual transition in heights and widths provides a better spatial connection for the eye. When the planting is sequenced according to the texture and color preferences (fine over coarse and with contrasts), the layering will be even more effective.

An inviting landscape is balanced in many ways, to bring comfort from a sense of harmony. A spatial balance can be achieved with symmetry, when elements are equally arranged around one or more axes and various portions of the design are in equilibrium with each other. It provides a formal character and is a very powerful design theme. Its fallacy is that the symmetry usually ends at some points, creating visual chaos in the transition.

A more relaxed and inviting approach to attain informal balance is through asymmetry, by applying equal visual weight from non-equivalent elements on either side of an axis. This option has the potential of being more visually interesting, because there are two sides to explore and observe. And the longer-term risk of not being able to maintain the symmetry is much reduced.

When the landscape is built according to the above principles, visual and physical balance will be achieved, and everything will appear in its rightful place. It will bring an internal feeling of

oneness and overall unity, and the spatial layout and organization will create a sense of order in the landscape. That is the ultimate accomplishment in creating an inviting landscape.

RESOURCES:

- ***Landscaping Principles and Practices***. 5th edition. Jack E. Ingels, State University of New York, College of Agriculture and Technology. Delmar (Thomson Learning), 1997.
- ***Residential Landscape Architecture: Design Process for the Private Residence***. 6th edition. Norman K. Booth and James E. Hiss. Prentice Hall, 2012.
- ***Sustainable Landscape Management: Design, Construction, and Maintenance***. Thomas W. Cook and Ann Marie Vanderzanden. John Wiley and Sons, 2011.
- ***Understanding Garden Design: The Complete Handbook for Aspiring Designers***. Vanessa Gardner Nagel, APLD. Timber Press, 2010.
- ***Therapeutic Landscapes: An Evidence-Based Approach to Designing Healing Gardens and Restorative Outdoor Spaces***. Clare Cooper Marcus and Naomi A. Sachs. John Wiley and Sons, 2014.