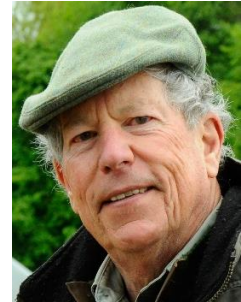


Garden Stone Works

By Al Call
May 4, 2018



Creating garden interest with stone

We have many choices when considering what to add to our garden besides plants. After all, plants can be a lot of work with all that watering, pruning, weeding and transplanting. Many gardeners in the Northwest seem to favor garden art. Who has not observed the steel framed salmon, having somehow become lost on its way upstream, leaping high over a clump of ferns; or fragments of colored glass tacked to the side of the tool shed; or the statue of a heron trying for all eternity to locate a frog under the birch tree? Often seen is the partially clad maiden of molded cement waiting in vain for a quick dip in the faux stream bed and, of course, for those with deeper pockets, the children in bronze, forever young, dancing across the lawn.

Many gardeners use little signs to add a bit of whimsy. Signs offering slugs for sale, warning signs commanding visitors to stay on the grass, notices entreating them to please climb this tree, or postings alerting them to watch out for quail crossing ahead and so on. Gnomes have long been popular with many, their leering faces peering out at you from beneath the boxwood as you walk the garden path. Wooden benches are found everywhere in gardens as places to relax and admire the work just done. Most gardeners are a restless lot, however, and the benches are often seldom used, developing fine layers of dust and leaves over time.

May I suggest instead that you take a moment and consider a bit of stone for your garden? After all, stone is from the earth and thus a natural element in the garden. Like perhaps the yellow Labrador from the canine world, stone can bring to the garden a sense of dignity, reliability, calm and beauty.

Stone can be used in many ways, e.g., for pathways, terraces, walls, pools, bird baths, benches and as edging for beds of plants. It may also be used effectively to mark an entrance to a path, create a focal point in the lawn and as a shield to warm your more tender plants and protect them from the wind.

Two cautionary points must be noted about stone. It can be expensive, and it can be dangerous. Purchasing stone precut or shaped into benches and bird baths can be among the costliest garden items you will ever buy. Random pieces are normally priced by the pound so the larger the piece the more expensive it will be. Popular types of stone from far away quarries will usually cost more too. However, in return for buying from stone yards, you will have access to professional advice and acquire stone that matches your requirements and can be delivered to your site.



This crisp, artistic dry stack wall makes a beautiful entry to a garden and the winding path beyond. *Photo by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener.*

You can help your budget by finding some stone on your own. Pieces may be available in your own yard or in your neighbors' yards. Construction sites, the edges of mountain roads and the boundaries of plowed fields can offer good hunting. Always ask permission, however, when visiting such places, and do not get too close to the rocky cliff above. Keep your vehicle well away from passing traffic.

The disadvantage with found stone in the Northwest is that it can be fragile and too round and smooth for walls and terraces. It will often be fresh looking without any sign of age or weathering. So be patient and selective. With experience, you will come to quickly pick out what is best for you.

A word on safety. Wear safety glasses, heavy gloves and hard-toed shoes or boots when working around stone. Try not to lift stone, but roll it, drag it or lever it into place. Invest in a balloon tire two-wheel hand cart to move stone any distance. You can later use that cart to move around your heavy flower pots and the large root balls of trees and shrubs, too. If you must lift stone, use proper lifting techniques or, better yet, text your teenage grandson and ask him up for the weekend. Tell him it's a good way to get ready for football.

Start your stone work with modest projects. Try placing one stone with a pointed end at the entrance to a path or maybe a stone or two as focal points in a flower bed. Choose stone of

substantial size for these projects and place at least half of their bulk below ground. Nothing in stone work looks more artificial than stone perched on the ground's surface.



Left: Stonework can be used to define and enhance a garden space, such as this bluestone patio. **Right:** Stone walls don't have to be large and imposing. These walls have a curved design and a break between that allows plants to peek out over them. *Photos by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners.*

Select stone that has a weathered appearance to add a sense of maturity in your garden. Stone in the Northwest will usually acquire moss and lichen readily, but pouring the occasional beer, sour cream or yogurt over them can sometimes hasten the process. Certainly, it will stimulate conversation among your neighbors.

Many books are available that suggest stone projects of varying complexity. Look them over to find appropriate ones for you. Yes, you too could someday be ready for one of the best stone undertakings of all, the dry stack stone wall. I hope you will come to enjoy the timeless, ageless quality that stone can provide.

RESOURCES:

- Landscaping with Stone. Pat Sagui. Creative Homeowner. 2005.
- Stonescaping. David Reed. Lark Books. 1998.