

The Entryway Garden

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November 2, 2018



A garden that welcomes

First impression matters. The front yard of a home is the most public space of the entire property. A good “curb appeal” is a positive reflection of the home’s residents. Therefore, it pays to enrich the home’s public face and settle it comfortably in its surroundings.

Creating a pleasant passage from the street or driveway to the front door goes one step farther, beyond a passive vantage point. A well-planned entryway garden unifies the indoor space with the outdoor space. It sets out a welcome mat for the visitors, greets the guests with open arms and sends them off with fond memories.

But how many of us actually have recently taken a critical look at our entryway, as if we were a first-time visitor? Here are some common conditions of the front yard and the approach-and-arrival sequence:

- large expanse of lawn without separation along property line
- scattered planting in lawn
- visual dominance of concrete or gravel driveway
- prominence of garage doors
- entry walkway too narrow
- entry walkway hidden from view
- entry foyer too small and lacks enclosure
- front door is hidden from view
- limited or no foundation planting
- overgrown foundation planting
- lack of privacy, especially for a corner lot
- little interest or enjoyment from front yard and entryway

The walkway and the front door should be easy to locate by the visitors, and the access to the front door should be safe, comfortable and enjoyable. For the convenience and comfort of the visitors and for security reasons, neither should be hidden by overgrown shrubs.

Still, the walkway should ideally not be a straight line. A straight line tends to dissect the garden, making it look smaller than it is.

Although other garden paths can be narrower, the walkway to the front door looks and works best when it is at least 4 feet wide, if not out of proportion with the house and the rest of the front yard. This allows two people to walk side-by-side.



This entryway garden includes a courtyard. *WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners/Photo by Everett Chu.*

The walkway can be landscaped on both sides to form an interesting garden floor, but it should not be lined with shrubs creating a tunnel effect. It can be made into a journey of small pleasures that appeal to the senses—sights, sound, smells, touches, etc.

For houses with more than one door facing the street or driveway, or on a corner lot fronting two separate streets, it is important to make the appropriate entry door more prominent. A wider walkway and a garden with a stronger visual appeal can help reduce a visitor's puzzlement and prevent a first-time visitor from arriving at the improper door.

The entryway garden should be a well-planned composition of color and texture. It may be intentionally bold, with a collection of flowering shrubs, perennials and annuals in a happy jumble. But it is best to keep the planting somewhat restrained. It should be simple and unified by repetition and massing of the same types of plants. Too many different plants give the appearance of busyness.

Most entryway gardens fit the category of a small-space garden, requiring intense design considerations. Or it can also be a courtyard garden, applying enclosures to enhance a sheltered ambience. Instead of a monotonous appearance, a series of strategically-placed emphases, such as colorful and structural plants, could lead the eye and visitors to the front door.



Left: This entryway garden includes a winding walkway. **Right:** An entry walkway to a downstairs patio and guestroom. *WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners/Photo by Everett Chu.*

Consider unifying the entryway garden with the architectural style of the house and the surrounding landscape, through a common set of design forms and palette of materials. Important design principles, such as focal points, layering, and sequencing, should be carefully applied.

A small bench along the entryway can provide an additional welcoming sign, even when rarely used. Planters with seasonable flowers offer cheerful colors and a decorative touch.

As a general rule, the closer the plants are to the walkway and the front door, the tidier and more-refined they should be. A large concentration of perennial flowers will look rowdy in off-season and a high proportion of deciduous shrubs will appear lifeless in the winter.

Taller shrubs may be used to soften the house corners and frame the front door. Small flowering trees can be used to advantage against a windowless wall, especially for a taller house, providing a focal point for the garden.

The following are sample lists of plants suitable for a tidy entryway garden, according to their sun/shade preferences:

Sun to part-sun garden

- *Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa' (dwarf English boxwood)
- *Euonymus japonicus* 'Microphyllus' (boxleaf euonymus)
- *Hemerocallis* 'Stella d'Oro' (dwarf yellow daylily)
- *Ilex crenata* 'Lemon Gem' (dwarf golden-tip Japanese holly)
- *Nandina domestica* 'Burgundy Wine' (heavenly bamboo)
- *Pinus mugo* 'Slowmound' (dwarf mugo pine)
- *Weigela florida* 'Dark Horse' (bronze-leaf compact weigela)

Part to full-shade garden

- *Camellia sasanqua* 'Yuletide' (single-flower red camellia)
- *Daphne odora* 'Aureomarginata' (golden variegated winter daphne)
- *Helleborus lividus* 'Pink Marble' (creamy-green hellebore)
- *Polystichum polyblepharum* (tassel fern)
- *Rhododendron* x 'Ramapo' (dwarf small-leaf rhododendron)
- *Sarcococca ruscifolia* (sweet box)
- *Vaccinium ovatum* 'Vacsid1' (scarlet ovation evergreen)

In summary, the front yard serves many utilitarian, aesthetic and psychological functions for the residents as well as for visitors, neighbors, and passers-by. It wears the face of the residents and carries a high priority in a landscape design. A well-appointed garden can make the entryway look more attractive and provide a sense of pleasure for the eye and mind.

RESOURCES:

- ***Residential Landscape Architecture: Design Process for the Private Residence.*** 6th edition. Norman K. Booth and James E. Hiss. Prentice Hall, 2012.
- ***Lifelong Landscape Design.*** Mary Palmer Dargan, ASLA. Gibbs Smith, 2012.
- ***Sustainable Landscape Management: Design, Construction, and Maintenance.*** Thomas W. Cook and Ann Marie Vanderzanden. John Wiley and Sons, 2011.
- ***The Less is More Garden: Big Ideas for Designing Your Small Yard.*** Susan Morrison, Timber Press. 2018.
- ***The Ultimate Garden Designer: The Next Best Thing to Hiring a Garden Designer.*** Tim Newbury, Ward Lock Wellington House. 2010.
- ***The Essential Garden Design Workbook.*** Rosemary Alexander, Timber Press. 2009.