



Trowel Talk!

January, 2011

Sticking to your principles

From time to time you may have sensed that your garden is missing something that you can't identify. Perhaps you found it was very plain and lacked any kind of impact. By learning to apply the following principles of garden design, it will be easier for you to change your garden into an attractive and enticing outdoor space.

Principles of garden design are similar to those for art and architecture and have been around since ancient Greek and Roman times. They determine how the various design elements such as line, colour, texture and form will be used. Your ability to skillfully apply these principles can make the difference between having a unified garden and a hodgepodge of plant material.

These all-important principles are rhythm, repetition, emphasis, balance, proportion, and unity. Rhythm means a flow or movement throughout a work of art or a musical piece. It brings the many parts of a garden together and requires a regular recurrence of a design element. A curved pathway of stepping stones from one garden space into another achieves a gentle flow and ties the spaces together both physically and in time, as you follow the path. You need to be careful, however, to ensure that the rhythm is



*This landscape shows **rhythm** as the eye is drawn smoothly down the gently curving path. The flow is natural because of the **repetition** of plant material along the path edge. The choice of plant material also repeats colour and texture – i.e., the blue-grey of the fescue is echoed in the creeping juniper. The texture of the path is similar to that of the stone bench which doubles as a focal point for **emphasis**. The scene is **balanced** through the use of repetition and equal weighted plants or objects (i.e., the tree on the left has similar scale & size to the lamp-post behind the bench). The generous width of the pathway and large plants and/or large clumps of smaller plants are in **proportion** with each other and this large landscape. And all of the above principles add to the sense of **unity** – the feeling that this garden is a cohesive whole – not the least bit disjointed.*

smooth; too many changes, sharp curves or unappealing plant material could disrupt this rhythm.

Repetition is the repeated use of one or more elements to unify the garden. Planting tall, upright ornamental grasses in groups at the front of a wrought-iron fence is a repetition of line elements. Another type of repetition is echoing. To join a house to the landscape, a weeping shrub could be planted to echo the arch of a doorway. Repetition that is too regular, however, such as red and white petunias planted along a pathway could create a very uninspiring border.

Emphasis is the attempt to make a specific aspect of the garden stand out. Most gardens improve with a focal point such as a beau-

tiful specimen plant, a statue or container. You can emphasize a certain component of the garden through contrast, light, location, colour or size but beware, in our era of garden art, too many focal points create a busy and cluttered garden.

Balance means that no one aspect of the garden should visually overpower another. Symmetrical balance of the formal design era is easy- everything to the right of the central axis is similar to everything on the left. Creating asymmetrical balance is more challenging and calls for more creativity. You need to determine what causes visual weight and how to increase or decrease it. Objects with a shiny surface increase visual weight as do large plants and bright, intense colours.

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Proportion is about relationships. For example, if you have a garden along the front of your house, consider its size in proportion to the size of the house. The building will overpower a bed next to its foundation, if the bed is too small.

The final principle is unity and it is often the one lacking in garden design. To produce a harmonious effect, all the elements need to work together. Some such as form, colour and texture can be strongly unifying but too much of one can become boring and lead to a less than satisfying garden.

This cold, snowy month is the ideal time to pick up one of your garden magazines and study the pictures. See if you can identify what principles of design are in play as you leaf through the pages. Understanding them will take you a long way toward improving your garden come spring

*Nancy Seppala
Master Gardener*

January TO DO List

- Check any bulbs that are in cold storage to ensure they have not dried out or show any signs of rot
- Check houseplants for signs of problems each time you water and treat immediately
- Start your "To Do" list for the garden. Research new plants and plan on trying something new this gardening season
- Read the germination instructions on seed packets to make sure you start the process early enough to have them germinate in time for planting out at the beginning of June.
- Some seeds require a period of cold to break their dormancy. Some perennial, tree and shrub seeds or sometimes seed you collected yourself or got at a seed exchange may need to be treated to a period of moist cold for a number of weeks. If you are not sure, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).



Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

None scheduled until Spring 2011

SPEAKING EVENTS:

Landscapes & plants that attract birds – January 17, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: David Hinks, Master Gardener

Top Generation Club Hall, 4373 Generation Court, Ramsayville, Ontario
Hosted by the Gloucester Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Starting plants from seed – January 25, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by the Ottawa Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Seed propagation – February 1, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Fran Dennett, Master Gardener

Old March Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata, Ontario
Hosted by the Kanata-March Horticultural Society (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

Tip of the Month:

A few more garden design tips to consider:

The focal point in a garden can be a specimen plant, bench, structure or even garden art. It can do double duty by drawing the eye away from a feature you prefer people didn't see. To make sure you get the focal point's placement right the first time, place something of similar size (such as a step ladder) in the proposed spot. Then walk around the yard to see if you get the effect you want. You might want it to be clearly visible from your kitchen window, but want it to be a discovery as you come around the corner of the house. By viewing

the "stand in" before you plant or build it, you can be sure you've got it situated in the right place. And hopefully avoid some heavy lifting! A garden hose is useful when laying out new garden beds or pathways in gently curving designs. Simply lay the hose out on the lawn, moving it in and out to form curves that will be the edge of the new bed or path. Step back to take a look – walk around and view it from different angles. Don't forget to consider traffic flow and maintenance. You may even want to push the lawnmower around the hose to ensure that the curves you've made are manageable for cutting the grass. This extra work before you dig should save you time later on.



Rain Barrel Truckload Sale

sponsored by
Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
April 17, 2011
10:00am – 2:00pm
parking lot at Building 72
Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm
(east off the roundabout on Prince of Wales Dr)



These rain barrels hold approximately 220 litres and come fully equipped with a leaf and mosquito filter basket, an overflow adaptor to connect barrels in series, 1.2m of overflow hose and a spigot.

\$55.00 each, taxes included

Reserve a barrel now: www.rainbarrel.ca/ottawacarleton

You can pay online by credit card or debit card.

Or you can order online and pay in CASH on pickup day.

Or call 613-236-0034 if you wish to prepay by cheque or have a volunteer assist you with making an online purchase.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Number of barrels: _____ Colours: _____

Paid by: cash or cheque Total: _____

Give this order form and your cheque (payable to MGOC - NOT post-dated) to any Ottawa-Carleton Master Gardener or call 613-236-0034 for mailing instructions.