

Designing Your Landscape

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Just like most other aspects of life, a successful garden begins with a plan. If you want a successful and functional landscape, before you ever visit a nursery or buy the first plant, you need a well thought out design. Mistakes in the landscape can be avoided by following a simple set of steps used by professionals such as landscape architects and landscape designers. Remember, plant selection follows the plan, not the other way around.

Step 1: Site Inventory

It is crucial to start with an inventory of existing conditions. This typically involves drawing a detailed plan that is drawn to scale. A land survey is required for property sales in Florida and often is a good starting point when creating a site inventory. This existing document will show existing boundaries, structures, roads, easements, access points and often utilities such as water and electrical. However, it is important to verify that the survey is accurate, complete and up to date. In Florida, a free service allows individuals to call 811 for help locating public utilities (phone, gas, electric, sewer, etc.) both above and below ground.

Knowledge of municipality zoning requirements and neighborhood covenants and restrictions is essential. This is particularly important if any structural work or changes are planned for the new landscape. Be sure to obtain all required permits. Permits may be required for removal of mature trees. It also is important to consider the above-ground and below-ground portions of the trees! It is advisable to consult a certified

arborist for the protection these valuable resources.

If supplemental irrigation for the landscape is deemed necessary, it will be important to plan ahead. Placement of irrigation lines is easier before landscape plants are installed. Plan before any trenching or digging is performed. This also is the time to plan if a non-potable water source can be utilized. Non-potable water is cheaper in the long run, but may require a separate metering system.

Existing vegetation may be a valuable asset to the new garden. Mature trees and shrubs of the right species and size can give the new landscape a sense of maturity and permanence. However, the existing plants need to be assessed for health and structure. Do they contribute to the desired character and requirements of the new landscape design? Do any of the existing plants need protection during construction and planting of the new landscape? Plants on adjacent lands also need to be considered. Do they affect the shading patterns on the new landscape? This significantly can affect the choice of new plant material and placement.

Step 2: Design Program

In essence, the design program defines the overall goals for the new landscape. The goals are set after evaluating the needs, wants and desired uses for the new landscape. The goals are evaluated with regard to the existing site inventory. Do existing conditions need to be altered to meet the new goals? The design

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program will guide the plan for achieving the desired result with regard to existing site amenities and site limitations.

Step 3: Landscape Master Concept Plan

The master plan is the culmination of the process of analyzing all the above information and meets the goals in a functional and aesthetic way. The master plan often takes into account the existing architectural style of the house and the character of the neighborhood.

The plan solution should include all of the necessary modifications and improvements required to achieve the goals for the new landscape. Among other things, the plan will address the need for work and other activity areas, traffic patterns including access points, views and privacy screening, noise abatement, drainage, and other environmental issues. It also must meet all codes and legal requirements.

This plan typically is formalized by using a scaled drawing, as mentioned in the introductory paragraph. An accurate and complete plan will help avoid costly errors when actual installation begins. It also assists in making accurate cost estimates when purchasing plants and landscape materials.

When initially developing a master concept plan, individual plants are not considered. Only later are individual plant species chosen which achieve the aesthetic and functional goals specified in the master plan. The plant selection plan, often called the planting plan, is done after design and prior to installation and includes the chosen plant species and varieties.

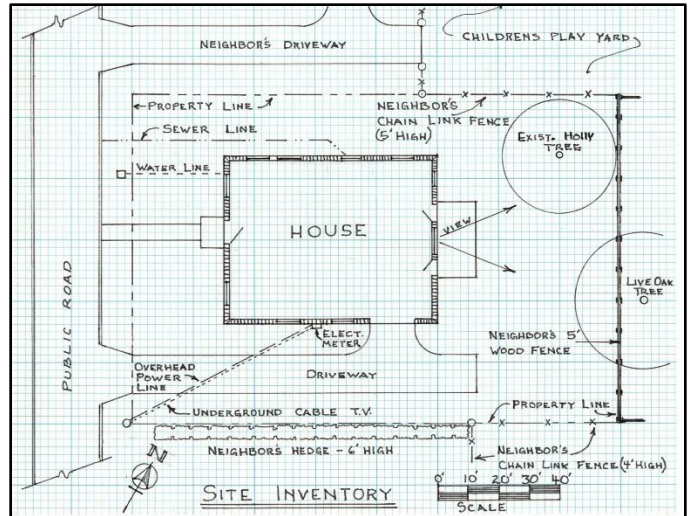


Figure 1. Site Inventory, showing all relevant influences on the design concept, including elements and activities on adjacent properties which may impact on the final design.

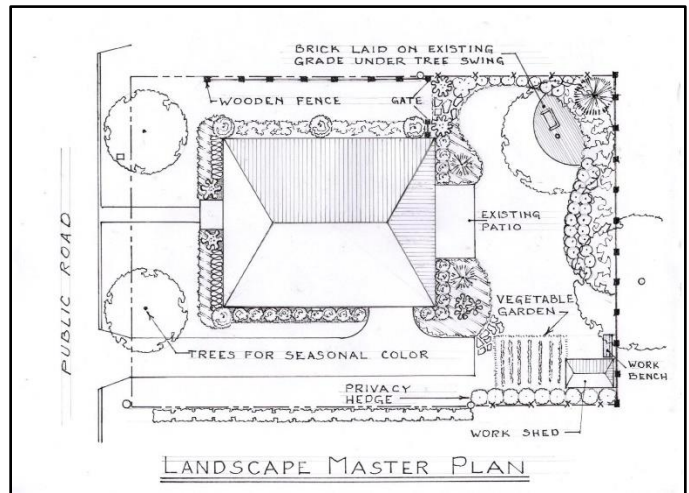


Figure 2. Landscape Master Plan, showing final design solution. Note that selection of specific plant species has not been done at this point. Plant selection will depend on the character or function in the drawing.