



HOME LANDSCAPE

"GOOD DESIGN PRINCIPLES"

HOME LANDSCAPE

“GOOD DESIGN PRINCIPLES”

Many lovely houses lack the important attribute of good landscape design. Here are a handful of principles. These are not hard-and-fast rules, but they are the kind of truisms in which great stock can be built. The goal here is to state these principles of “good” design as they relate to common issues involved in a residential landscape design.

The first principle concerns responsiveness to the nature of a landscape site. A residence and its landscape design should respond specifically to both existing vegetation and its microclimate. Let's consider siting a residence on a lot. Climate is an integral part of every parcel of land. We know that the sunlight varies with hourly and seasonal directions. The prevailing winds of summer and winter are inherited in a site, and so is elevation. Each site has its own slope that carries in direction and steepness. It is important to observe that all these things have some bearing on a possible design layout.

A checklist of assets for a good house orientation in regard to energy conservation may include a southern exposure to provide winter sun; availability of summer breezes for cooling; protection from winter winds; and deciduous trees to the south and west. The avoidance of unwanted heat loss or gain, and positive use of solar radiation heating, while but no means new considerations, these are motivation basis for good landscape design.

Influential to the success of a landscape design is keeping outdoor living space to the south of the house. Gardens will be happy places full of activity and laughter in the sun. However, all the attention and the most beautiful details will not prevent a patio situation on the north side of the house from being a silent gloomy place. Several thousand can be wasted on a patio construction on a home's north side that never gets sun.

The second principle concerns simplicity in circulation. Simple lines of access are essential to using a site. However, often houses are built before any clear idea is formed of its relation to the adjoining units of driveway, parking area, and main entry. Good design should help the user understand where they are and how to get where they want to go.

How does one get from the care to the house? The walk to a main entrance should be effortless, but often it is a mystery to be solved (where is the front door?). There should be no question in one's mind as to the direction of the main entrance. Plenty of attention is necessary in the definition of views, transition space, and point of access. The entrance must be placed in such a way that people who approach the home see the entrance or some hint of where the entrance is, as soon as they see the house itself. This makes it possible for them to orient their movements toward the front door, without having to change direction or change their plan of how they will approach it.

The third principle: make direct connections with nature. In good design, the house and the plan of its site should be studied together. Only in this way is it possible to solve the various site problems satisfactorily, and make the house fit comfortably into its surroundings. Paver terraces tied to the foundation of the house help make this connection. Each house should have a reasonable amount of them, pushing out into land surrounding the house and opening up the outdoors to the inside.

The fourth principle is to avoid what is called artificial edges. In good design, a defined edge for an outdoor space separates it and at the same time joins it to the surrounding landscape. The "artificiality" of edges is sometimes carried to such an extreme that formal plant forms are maintained but constant trimming. In the immediate surroundings of a house, some degree of formality is appropriate as a setting for architecture. In areas away from the house, an informal style needs to blend with surrounding landscape. Grow grass, bushes, flowers, and trees in a way, which comes close to the way, in which they occur in nature: intermingled, without barriers between them, without formal flowerbeds, and without boundaries and edges.

The fifth and final principle is every plant has a purpose. This is so important and very overlooked. Plants are not frills to be located indiscriminately. They should be used to reinforce the structure of the design implied in the first four principles. For example, they are an excellent means of marking the various functional areas from each other. In conclusion, plants should be selected by considering their adaptability and intended function first, then requirements and seasonal interest.

These, then, are a handful of thoughts about what constitutes good landscape design. There are many more principles and guidelines that constitute good landscape design. But these chosen few should be highly valued.