



Gardens in Landscape Design

CUTTING GARDENS

There are several advantages to creating a cutting garden. Cutting gardens allow the gardener to use cut flowers in the home without removing them from borders and other landscape areas. They allow the gardener to plan for these needs without disturbing or reducing landscape plantings. And annuals and perennials can be grown conveniently and efficiently in rows for ease in gathering and maintaining.

Although they do not need to be unattractive, it's more sensible to locate a cutting garden in an area where they are not the focal point. Cut flowers are often included in a vegetable garden for easy tending and harvesting.

Annuals that were frequently found in vegetable and cutting gardens of our ancestors include marigolds, zinnias, poppies, sweet peas, bells of Ireland, nasturtium, globe amaranth and larkspur. Shasta daisies, phlox and chrysanthemums were especially popular perennials.

THE CONTEMPORARY COTTAGE GARDEN

Homeowners today can easily update the cottage gardening style so common in Texas and the Gulf South 50 to 150 years ago. A cottage garden is particularly appropriate for town houses and other small properties where most modern landscaping efforts consist of a few dull shrubs and ground covers unimaginatively placed against structural foundations. Traditional cottage gardens need not be expensive or require great amounts of space. They are appropriate for new housing developments in the city, suburban bungalows or country homes.

There are a few rules to keep in mind when planning a cottage garden. Usually

they are modest in size, often enclosed by picket fencing, walls, or hedges. They contain a wide variety of plant materials selected by the owner for their beauty, emotional value, or real usefulness. Cottage gardens reflect the owner's individualism, so no two gardens should ever be alike. Native plants and successful imports to the Brazos Valley are often the best choices for cottage gardens.

In addition to the distinguishing features of enclosures with fences, walls, and hedges, an extensive collection of plants, and limitations in size, cottage gardens usually had a straight walk or path leading to the front door. Another typical characteristic was the separately enclosed "swept" backyard. There was no turf or ground cover in that space, and where the ground was free of plants, the cottage gardener would periodically sweep the bare earth with a broom.

Gardeners often planted back yards with fruit trees and included outbuildings. Curving or straight walks of native stone or brick sometimes intersected the front walk near the entrance and provided access to the sides and back garden areas. Sometimes cottage gardens included formal touches, such as a parterre featuring a sundial, birdbath, or other garden ornament, as well as garden benches.

CONTAINER GARDENS

Container gardening is a practical way to replace lost ground space in our urban environments. Effective selecting and placing of containers can add formal or informal appeal to the garden. Advantages to container culture include the ability to control soil quality, watering, and placement of plants. Another advantage is that tropical plants such as Bougainvilleas may be used in areas outside their natural range of cold tolerance by moving them to

protected locations for short periods during the winter.

Perennial plants with cascading growth habits such as *Asparagus sprengeri*, lantana, verbena, and dianthus are particularly effective in containers where they can spill over the edge to create a special effect. Large trees and shrubs are often more attractive when the soil at their base is covered with various flowering annuals or perennial plants. Flowering bulbs may also be included to add magic at various seasons of the year.

Hanging containers can add another dimension to the landscape. When used with restraint and scaled to the surroundings, hanging ferns, lantanas, and various cascading annuals and perennials can be significant additions to courtyards, entrance areas and terraces.

Container plants usually require more maintenance than those planted directly in the ground. Restricted root zones in containers require more frequent watering and fertilizing to keep the plants in top condition. Plants in containers are also more susceptible to damage from extremes of cold or heat, since the roots are above ground and are more exposed to the elements.

Both aesthetic and practical factors will dictate the choice of containers. Plants grown in unglazed clay pots generally require more water than plants in plastic or glazed pots, since water and air penetrate the relatively porous clay.

A drainage hole in the bottom or side is essential for success with container plants. If containers without drain holes must be used, consider "double potting" by simply lining the undrained container with a smaller pot equipped with drain holes. Since the growing area is restricted, it is important that the growing media be of high quality. Packaged potting mixes are available in large or small quantities and are a practical choice for most situations. If soil is used, it should be

mixed with liberal amounts of sphagnum peat, compost, or rotted pine bark.

POCKETS OF COLOR

Modest sized spaces can be prepared for clumps of seasonal color by enlarging planting areas in front of evergreen shrubs. Make sure to plant a sufficient quantity of the flower of your choice, so that the effect is not just a "spot" in the overall picture. Keep in mind that shrubs and nearby trees may have so completely laced the potential planting area with their roots that they must sometimes be removed before you can have any success with flowering plants.

Possibilities that come to mind for this type of pocket-planting include masses or borders of some of the lower growing daylilies or irises in front of evergreen shrubs. Entrance areas are a logical place to provide welcoming pockets of color. The amount of space most homeowners can comfortably maintain in annuals or perennials is relatively small. Concentrating these efforts where they will be seen and enjoyed makes good gardening sense.

With our long growing season in Central Texas and relatively short winters, landscape maintenance becomes an almost year-round affair. Perennials generally require less maintenance than annuals, and since they often return each year, they can be a wise garden investment.

For pockets of color around outdoor living areas, swimming pools and entrance courts, containers offer some great possibilities. Portability is a special asset of container plants, since they can be moved to a less prominent location when not at their best.

WOODLAND GARDENS

Woodland areas offer special challenges and opportunities for gardening. If you plan to garden a heavily wooded site, first consider removing some of the underbrush and low-lying limbs of trees. Often, it is sensible to remove small, weak

trees that are too close together to develop or contribute to the overall effect.

Shade is a major challenge to successful woodland gardening. Sometimes thinning the upper branches of mature trees will not only provide more penetration of light, but will also enhance the tree's beauty by exposing its structure.

Improving the soil in woodland areas also poses a problem, since woodland soil tends to be filled with roots. Add at least 5 to 6 feet of compost, rotted pine bark, peat moss, or similar material should be applied to the soil surface before spading or tilling it in. Slightly raised irregular paths of bark, mulch, or natural colored gravel can add a nice touch to wooded gardens, while providing pedestrian circulation and design continuity.

Since deciduous trees allow considerable sunlight to reach the ground beneath them during winter and early spring, woodland gardeners tend to rely on spring flowering plants. There are, however, numerous ferns, aspidistra, Vinca major, liriopse, and others that can add textural variation and color of green to such a setting. Native shrubs like black haw, dogwood and Mexican plum also provide good fall color, as well as spring bloom. Some summer flowering annuals, such as impatiens, wax begonias, and caladiums are dependable sources of bright color in shaded gardens.

Woodland gardens are more difficult to create than cottage gardens or herbaceous borders because they rarely have well-defined boundaries and can easily fall into a stiff or unnatural appearance. A popular approach is to group spring flowering bulbs in wooded areas or near their edge because they will look natural, once established, especially if set out in "drifts." Some gardeners have recommended pitching bulbs over one's shoulder and planting them where they land to ensure a "natural" look.