

Art and the Garden

Now that the patio doors are open for the summer season and the outdoor furniture ideally placed for comfort, it's time to turn your attention to add some finishing touches to the surrounding landscape to make the scene complete. Because our backyards have become an extension of our indoor living space, many homeowners view their landscape as a place to express their creativity, using their artistic flair to create a cozy, inviting outdoor space.

Some design their landscapes to be an experience. These homeowners create multiple vignettes and points of interest that can be seen only when wandering through the garden. For them the experience in the garden is comparable to wandering through the rooms and halls of a museum. Each flower bed and area of the garden offers a different place to contemplate the colors, shapes and textures of the plants that fill it, to view a statue or water feature, or to find a place to sit.

Just as a museum, the garden should offer room for wandering. This provides a chance to view the various areas of the garden and be drawn into different spaces. Meandering paths are a good way to lead people through your landscape. Most people have a sense of adventure and curiosity and will follow welcoming paths in familiar environments to see where they lead.

The end of a path or an open space is a perfect place to site a bench or chair for meditation or an object (artifact) to contemplate. These garden focal points can be hidden throughout the landscape – places, plants and art to find and enjoy. Or they can be very obvious features seen from every angle of the yard – like an arbor over a gate or copies of architectural ruins like Roman columns or a small scale Monticello -- known as follies. There are all kinds of “art” that can be used to create interest. The list is endless
-- specimen trees and shrubs, unusual plants or plant combinations, bird baths, statuary, water gardens, urns, interesting pots, trellises, arbors, old iron fences or gates, and more. These items can be purchased from your local garden center or found in an attic or garage – two great resources for old doors, windows or pieces of furniture. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

Consider placing an unusually shaped door or door frame at an entrance to a side yard or incorporating it into a fence. They could also be used as a trellis or just perfectly placed to frame a view. Old doors come in different shapes, sizes and with interesting textures and colors. They can be easily painted or covered with vines to create a beautiful place in your landscape.

More common forms of art can be seen in people's yards as homeowners add features that are commonly seen inside our homes. A fireplace is typically a formal centerpiece in our home which can become an artistic expression with the use of metal backdrops and colored glass when we place them in our landscape. These features have become a popular addition to many yards. They offer a gathering place where people gather to chat as the sun sets and the cool summer air settles in for the night. These architectural features can become as elaborate as you'd like but should compliment your taste and work with the existing colors in your landscape. The selection of prefabricated fireplaces is extensive or you can design a custom one for extra pizzazz.

Feel like your yard is too small to add an artistic space? Even a small space can be a special place to express your creativity. By using plants with a variety of textures, shapes and colors, you can make a profound statement. Consider a shade garden planted with ferns, astilbe, hostas and a small Japanese maple. Or plant a colorful butterfly garden with water-wise coneflowers, butterfly bushes, bee balm and oregano. Or plant a unique container with a variety of hardy succulents and sedums to make a wonderful, low maintenance focal point in a sunny location. Another simple, yet eye-catching idea for a sunny spot is a large water pot with a lotus (or other water plants) growing in it.

The main objective in expressing art in a small space is to choose an area of your garden and make it different than rest. By keeping this area unique from its surroundings, you can make it a place that will draw a visitor's eye to notice the variations in the small space.

Your yard is an ideal area in which to incorporate your sense of style and artistic taste -- from old furniture and artifacts to oddly shaped or brightly colored plants. Use your landscape as you would the space in your home -- your palette of plants as the paint -- and interesting objects, furniture, and more to express your individual taste. Have fun with your garden and enjoy the space you've created outside. Even with the hot summer sun, northern Nevada offers seasons of interest for us to sit and enjoy art in our outdoor landscape.