

#4 Winter – Time to Design

Winter is officially here and another year has come and gone. With the beginning of the 2007 season many of us have made new years resolutions with the intent of reaching a goal or finishing a project. For the homeowner this resolution may be as simple as updating features in their yard or facing the challenge of designing their landscape from bare earth to the ground up.

Now is the time to start the design process as spring will be quickly upon us. A well planned design will help accelerate and simplify your landscape project when the time arrives. To begin the design process it is necessary to have or create a sketch of the area being worked on. This can be done simply with the use of a tape measure, ruler and some graph paper for small areas. For projects that incorporate large areas of the yard, it is beneficial to use an overall site plan of your property. This will allow you to have a scaled drawing of the project site you are working on. Site plans can usually be obtained from the builder: if this is not an option, you can explore the “Mapserver” on the City of Reno website (www.cityofreno.com). Don’t forget to indicate directions on your map. Place a north arrow on your drawing so you can identify planting zones later.

Once the project area has been defined with an accurate sketch of the site created the fun can begin. The first step in creating the design is knowing what you want and understanding what is realistic for your area. There are many wonderful plants that can be grown in our northern Nevada climate. Our local bookstores and nurseries offer a variety of landscape books and magazines that can help with this process. Use these resources to research landscape styles and find what fits your taste and needs. Make copies and keep clippings of photos and ideas you may want to incorporate into your yard.

Now that you’ve selected a style or theme you’d like to incorporate in your landscape you can begin drawing on your plan. Take a look at the direction your project site faces. This is important as every plant has different needs. If your area faces south it will receive the summer’s hot afternoon sun. Make sure the plants you are placing here are able to withstand the direct sun. A project that faces north will only receive morning light so plants need to be more shade tolerant. This can be difficult if you are not familiar with the plants that thrive on our northern Nevada climate. We recommend visiting local garden centers and other use your local resources (cooperative extension, libraries, etc) to help answer any questions.

Once materials and turfgrass designated for the project area, you’re ready to think about plant quantities and spacing. If you overplant an area the vegetation will suffer over the years as plants compete for space and water. Think about the

mature size of the plants and space them accordingly (most plants are sold with growing information and can also be found on line and in garden books).

Remember when placing the plants to keep a rhythm with the planting and try to create a balance in the landscape. This means keeping a good ratio of deciduous and evergreen plants in the yard. For a formal landscape this could mean creating rows of same plant type. For a more eclectic feel you can create drifts of plant material and not place individual species that will get lost when placed in the landscape. Take note of the plants' respective heights before you finalize their placement. Place the taller plants in the back to create a layered effect and enable all plants to be seen. These methods will create a sense of flow in the yard and your eye will move easily across the entire landscape.

Now that the design has been created you can contemplate various mulch types that can be used to compliment your planting beds. From decomposed granite to decorative rock there are a variety of mulch choices that can be chosen to top dress your yard. Some may choose to explore the benefits of bark mulch and compost. These types of mulch will provide nutrients for your plants as they breakdown and incorporate into the native soil. You can mix and match materials or just choose one as each mulch will create a visual interest and help conserve water too. Visit a local rock yard or nursery to see the choices that are available.

With a plan in hand you are getting closer to seeing your new design installed. At this point you will need to decide how you want to implement your project. The do-it-yourselfer will want to start researching water and irrigation needs. Others may hand their plans off to a licensed landscape contractor and watch their ideas be built up before their eyes. Whichever method you choose take the time to enjoy the design process and learn more about the landscape being placed in your yard and the many plants we can use to create our ideal landscape.