



Beyond the Bushes



By Garry Menendez, University of Tennessee

This is the time of year when our thoughts turn to our gardens and landscapes. We're second guessing our selection of annuals & perennials and wondering how many days until the first frost. But there is more to consider when it comes to the landscape than just trees and shrubs. Landscape design should be all-inclusive. As one famous landscape architect, Thomas Church, said, "Horticultural excellence in the garden can never compensate for a fundamentally bad layout." It's true. Nobody will give second thought to the fact that your azaleas' blooms complement the trim of your home if they have to slog through mud in order to reach your front door.

Whenever working on any landscape design, I find myself thinking in terms of puzzle pieces. These pieces represent the different amenities someone may want to incorporate in their garden: a pond, gazebo, fencing, patio, play structure, arbor, swimming pool, perennial border, and so on. It is only after I figure out a way to put the pieces together in a logical but creative manner that I consider how to glue it all together and create interest by naming the specific plant materials.

PHOTOS: Garry Menendez

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One of the most important but overlooked principles of landscape design is circulation. In addition to figuring out how to get there from here, the entrance to your home should be pleasant and effortless. First impressions are indeed lasting, as corny as that may sound. Heaps of hospitality will add little comfort to the visitor who has stumbled up your front steps and stood in a chilling rain only to be bumped from a scrawny stoop as a storm door swings out to greet them.

Before you choose your trees and shrubs, think about what you want them to accomplish. Are they to provide shade, screening or seasonal interest? Will they provide the year-round privacy you desire or would a series of wooden fence panels do the job more effectively without eating up too much precious space? Finding a flat yard in East Tennessee is like finding sidewalks near the school. They're out there but you have to look pretty hard. When dealing with slope you have three basic options. You can plant it, terrace it or ignore it. If you choose to construct some terraces, you'll need to think of wall building materials and maintenance. Composting should



be automatic for conscientious citizens as ourselves. Judging from the number of folks I encounter at the Kroger recycling center, I would love to assume that everyone reading this has a compost bin on their property. The landscape should be designed to acknowledge this. After all, it's another piece of the puzzle.

When you really sit down and think about it, the landscape includes everything that surrounds us. Pavement, turf, walls, water, lighting and woody, perennial and annual plants. We should think about the relationship of all the components in order to create a total landscape design. When you look beyond the bushes, the opportunities are endless. ❁

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