

When you hear the term “subdivision” what do you envision? Coming from someone with a bumper sticker on the back of his truck which reads “Urban Sprawl – Cut Down All the Trees and Name the Streets After Them,” I usually picture just that scene. With regard to landscape design though, this word can have many positive effects. Allow me to explain.

The buzz phrase in many landscape design articles is the term “outdoor room.” The focus of many of these pieces is more on how to decorate these rooms, not how to create them. Many homes today are the result of a developer buying a chunk of farmland and laying out roads and utilities, accompanied by fairly evenly sized parcels on which to place single family structures. Let’s face it, after construction and some token shrub planting, these all look about the same. That is exactly why landscape design is so very important, giving you a chance to personalize your outdoor living space. After a period of getting the interior of your home just right with proper furnishing

and décor many folks will then get the itch to work on making the exterior just as cozy. Here is where mistakes are made if one begins by thinking of just plants and not spaces.

THE CHALLENGE

Many homes in our region sit on about a quarter acre. When designing our landscapes we typically decorate the foundation of the house, plop a couple of decorative trees in the yard and call it done. The vast amount of yard that is left is seen as nothing more than something to mow and try to keep green through the summer. Let’s think inside the box for a moment (now there’s a new phrase).

The Art of Subdividing



*Why landscape design
is so very important*

Story and Photos by Garry Menendez

What I'm talking about is making your property more pleasing to the human eye by being bold and subdividing. Let's begin with the backyard.

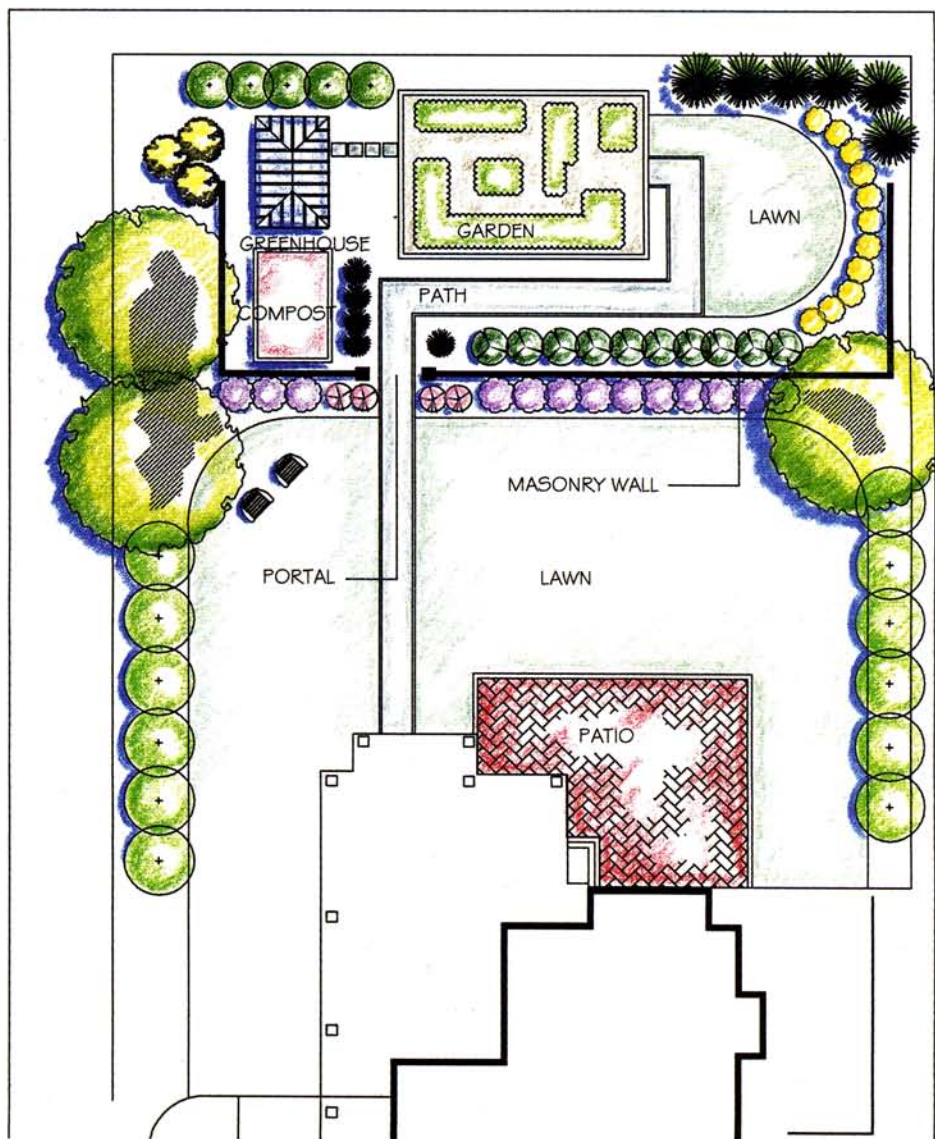
We tend to want to lord over our properties by standing on the back deck and boasting in not too loud of a voice, "I own all that I see!" (or at least from that property line, to that one). What if you couldn't see all that you own? Any good design begins with some paper and a vision. Draw your property at a workable scale (1 inch equals 10 feet is a good one). Start by locating any existing elements that you want to keep (trees, patio, etc.). The next step in this challenge to subdivide is to develop some privacy, which usually means working around the perimeter and placing some plant materials which will screen neighbors that are just a bit too close, or a view to a busy street. Up until this point there is nothing groundbreaking about your design. Things are about to get interesting.

THE CHANGE

If you own one of these typical lots and still see a fairly sizeable piece of lawn left on your design after completing the steps mentioned, draw a hedge or row of plants across the middle of your backyard parallel to the house, leaving a gap through which to circulate. This gap doesn't necessarily need to be in the middle and may be better placed two-thirds of the distance along the hedge. There you go, you've done it! (at least on paper). You have created two rooms or subspaces. In the room closest to the house you will more likely relax on a patio or terrace reading a book (or travel atlas in my case) while getting up occasionally to flip the burgers or calling to your spouse to please bring you another beverage. In the room farthest from the house the possibilities are endless. Maybe this is where you tinker in the vegetable garden or string a hammock between two well-placed trees or posts to get away from it all, while never being more than 50 feet from the comfort of your own bathroom.

This was just one quick example. You may further subdivide these two spaces into smaller ones, creating a secret garden which the closest of your friends may not even know exists until at least their third visit. Whatever you do, don't underestimate the need for good circulation (and we're not talking about HDL cholesterol). You have to have adequate paths on which to flow from one room to the next, but that's a whole other article.

We tend to think of backyards only when designing spaces in which we may



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Subdividing your landscape can open areas up for special projects such as tinkering with a vegetable garden. ►

unwind. Front yards are fair game too. Consider planting a buffer between your front yard and the street. This need not be a fortress-like wall but simply a planting of evergreens which grow to about 4 feet and allow passersby to enjoy your lovely home while at the same time serving as a backdrop for some of your prized perennials. We all know we spend more time looking out of our windows than we do standing in the street looking back at our homes. On the other hand, passersby may tend to look out of their car windows as they drive by, and you don't want to disappoint them.



Top to bottom

Making room for a place to sit and relax at the end of the day is a great investment of time and money.

A combination of species provides a look that is pleasing to the eye and beautiful year-round.

Pathways leading visitors from one room to the next are an attractive use of space.



THE CHOICES

In today's world there are many choices (many, many choices—just look in the toothpaste aisle). The same is true when selecting the materials you want to use for these subdivided spaces. If you're cheap like me, you buy small evergreen shrubs such as yews, laurel, holly or arborvitae and patiently watch them grow into a wall. If you are more adventurous and sure about your long term planning, you may opt for a free-standing masonry wall such as brick or stone (yes, its really important to leave a circulation gap). In smaller yards where space is at a premium, you may consider some of the products found online such as a green-screen (a wire mesh onto which vines may be grown to create a green, living wall) or simply use your own creative fence panels to do the same thing.

After much rambling, my point is this: be bold—subdivide. Just as we favor restaurants which provide cozy seating and comforting subspaces, we crave that same level of detail in our gardens. You may start on paper or simply have your children position themselves in your yard (alright, borrow some neighborhood kids and pets) in order that you may get a better visual sense of what some thoughtful subdividing will do. 🐾

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