



10-Minute University™

*Oregon Master Gardener™ Association – Clackamas County Chapter
In Cooperation with Oregon State University Extension Service*



Garden Design 101

Good design is the foundation of a beautiful, healthy, and sustainable garden. A well thought-out plan combines the elements of good design – line, form, texture, scent and color – while incorporating the needs and wishes of the home owner.

Hardscape

Path: Main paths should be wide enough for at least two people to walk side by side, at least 5 feet. For secondary paths where people walk single file, the width should be at least 3 feet.

Paving: Give secure footing priority. Avoid slick surfaces or loosely set pavers that wobble. Use unsifted gravel with sharp edges for gravel paths because they compact better and don't roll.

Steps: Keep garden steps to no more than 6 inches high. The depth of each step plus twice the height should be equal to 26 inches. So steps with a 6 inch rise would require a run of 14 inches. If your garden stairways include more than 10 steps, consider including a landing after every fourth or fifth step. A generous landing is necessary whenever a stairway changes direction; landings should be at least as deep as the stairs are wide.

Patio and Deck: Consider how you plan to use the space for dining or mingling and the likely number of guests. Allow at least 4 square feet of space per person. In placing outdoor furniture, leave a 3-foot perimeter around any furniture grouping for comfortable movement.

Logistics

Driveway: Before installing shrubs, walls, or fences, check out sight lines by sitting in your car to make sure views are not blocked.

Neighbors: Ensure you know any requirements of your home owner association and local jurisdiction. Consult with neighbors about your ideas if feasible.

Utilities: Contact your municipalities and utilities for marking underground lines if you plan to change grades, dig trenches more than 18 inches deep, or dig up patios and sidewalks. Call 811 or visit digsafelyoregon.com

Design Plan

Base Map: Develop a base map on graph paper to show existing location of buildings, paths, trees, and other significant features. It is common for designers to make one square equal to 1 or 2 feet of actual size. Use rulers, T-squares, triangles, and landscape templates as needed. Next, add lighting, water features, paths, patios, or any other hardscape. Chart sun and shade pattern.

Planting Design: A good starting size for a border is 8 feet wide by 24 feet long; choose a size that will fit your location as well as your time and budget. First, play with the shape of garden beds on your map, then lay out hoses to mark borders for future beds. Use a variety of plants (trees, shrubs,

perennials, and bulbs) to create a tapestry of foliage and full seasons of blooms. Allow room for plants to mature.

Plants

Plan for Growth: Place plants so that they are not crowded at maturity. Consult plant tags but know that plants in the Willamette Valley often get bigger than indicated. If you must have a full landscape right away, plant with the intent to relocate or remove some plants later. You may also use annuals and short-lived perennials as filler plants in new plantings.

Keep Proper Distance: Place tall plants (30-inches or taller) at least 2 feet back from walkways and patio edges. Otherwise, these spaces may feel crowded. Also keep thorny plants like roses away from traffic areas.

Think Beyond the Bloom: While flowers are attractive, many plants offer foliage, fruit, and bark for year-long color, form, and texture. Extend your garden's appeal by using fall foliage color and winter interest with fruits, bark, and seed heads.

Lawn Has Its Place: A lawn offers a place for the eye to rest from the exuberance of your garden. It also provides space to go barefoot or play games. Choose a size that is manageable and meets your needs.

Plant Selection: Start by making a list of all the plants you want to grow; check their requirements to make sure they will thrive in your soil, moisture and light conditions. Then, make a chart of these plants with columns for the type (i.e., evergreen shrub), height and width, foliage color, bloom color and time, fragrance, and anything else that is special about this plant. Check availability locally.

Plant Placement: Use key plants as the basis for creating combinations with other plants. Review your chart and choose a few plants with multi-season interests as anchors of your design and build vignettes around them. Contrast billowing, airy plants with bold-textured plants. Place rounded forms next to spiky forms and use low-mounding or trailing plants at the front of the border to unify the edge.

Build combinations by surrounding them with complementary plants that bloom at the same time. This will strengthen the visual appeal of your garden. In a small garden, too many colors can look chaotic. Pick a cool or a warm color scheme and choose the plants from your plant list.

On your site map, use the landscape template and find the figure that matches the plants' mature size and convert it to the scale of your drawing. Let the edges overlap, since the plants will interweave in your garden. Use colored pencils on an overlay to see if the design pleases you.

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas County), 503-821-1150 (Washington County), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County).
- For other 10-Minute University™ handouts and class schedule, visit www.cmastergardeners.org
- Submit gardening question online at www.metromastergardeners.org

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