

10-Minute University™

*The Clackamas County Master Gardener Association in collaboration with and
in support of the OSU Extension Master Gardener™ Program*



Path, Place, and Wallpaper

An Alternate Perspective on Home Landscape Design

How to Use This Handout

This handout and its accompanying video, called [Path, Place, and Wallpaper](#), offer a different perspective on designing a home landscape. Taking the time to create a home landscape design, which is not the same as a “planting plan,” can provide significant benefits in how homeowners use and enjoy their yards. Two additional videos, [Garden Transformation](#) and [Lander's Backyard Oasis](#), further illustrate ideas discussed in this handout. Not discussed in this handout, but equally important, is how to advance concepts to planting plans. The [Garden Design 101](#) video contains information about that.

Terminology

Place: Define place by the intended purpose of the space, such as outdoor dining or birdwatching, rather than by features alone. Start by deciding how you want to use a space, noting that some uses may be incompatible (for example, play areas and spiny plants).

Path: A path is a route from Point A to Point B. The path between them can be visible or hidden, real or imaginary. There are three types of paths. Destination Paths are practical routes, such as the path to take the garbage bin to the street. Paths of Experience are rare in home landscapes. In the [Garden Transformation](#) video, the Rondone Garden has a path that offers the experience of walking through a grass prairie. Paths of Temptation are a series of reasons to stop. The Lander Garden features a narrow koi pond, a stream with four waterfalls, and an easy-to-walk concrete path that showcases living treasures—over a dozen palm trees overhead to scores of shrubs and tiny plants underneath. You can’t walk more than a few feet without stopping and saying “Oh!”

Wallpaper: Many homes have a sizable area between the front of the house and the sidewalk or street that isn’t exactly a place or a path. It is the gift your house gives to the street with its own character and rules. It is often the easiest space in the home landscape to design. The video demonstrates a method any homeowner can use to quickly improve their existing wallpaper or create an attractive new design.

The Design Process

Start your home landscape design by deciding how you wish to use your outdoor space. For many gardeners, growing a wide array of interesting plants may be the primary use. Others may value wildlife habitats. Yet some desire a place to relax and commune with nature. Begin the design process with a wish list of activities.

Next, use the Decision Matrix to prioritize items on this wish list. The [Path, Place, Wallpaper](#) video shows how to use this tool to clarify priorities when there isn’t enough space or limited funds for the entire wish list.

You also need to identify constraints, including those outside your boundaries, that affect how you will use your property. Common examples include sightlines from nearby houses, shaded areas, traffic noise, buried utility lines, and steep grade changes. These should be documented on a diagram. Watch the [Path, Place, and Wallpaper](#) video for more information.

Now you are ready to create a home landscape design that focuses on your highest priority uses. This design will be drawn on a basic site plan, a scaled drawing that shows the property lines, location of the house, driveway, underground utilities, hose bibs, and slopes. Add a north arrow. Include trees, paths, patios, and other features you would not alter or remove. You can draw one yourself using gridded paper or pay a surveyor if your site is sloped or complicated. Make multiple copies of this site plan for the next step.

Try your hand at adding priority uses to the basic site plan. Start by using rough bubble diagrams to allocate uses. Add features to overcome constraints. Feel free to develop ideas or abandon them. Over time, you'll become more comfortable with the process.

Add the best solutions to the basic site plan. This becomes your new landscape design. Use this as a reference when making specific decisions and planning for planting or construction, including plant selections and methods for building the desired hardscaping. The [Garden Design 101](#) video has examples of how to create a planting plan and organize a plant list.

How to Choose Plants

Plant List: Five plant lists from 10-Minute University, in collaboration with Great Plant Picks, can help you get started. They include: [Trees](#), [Conifers](#), [Shrubs](#), [Perennials](#), [Bulb/Fern/Vine/Grass](#). All plants are hardy to USDA zone 7 and higher, resistant to pests and diseases, and offer more than one season of interest in the garden. Many plants also provide ecological benefits, such as supporting pollinators, providing bird food, and creating habitat for wildlife.

Winter Hardiness: Choose plants that are suitable for your climate zone. Consult the USDA Zone Map to determine the cold hardiness of your plants.

Other resources: *The Sunset Western Garden Book* offers many plant ideas. Walk around your neighborhood to identify potential plants using a mobile phone app such as Plant.net or iNaturalist.

Master Gardener™ advice

Contact the local OSU Extension office for Master Gardener advice. Check this site for contact information: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/find-us>

For 10-Minute University™ handouts and class schedule, visit <https://cmastergardeners.org>

Oregon State University Extension Service prohibits discrimination in all its programs, services, activities, and materials on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, familial/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, genetic information, veteran status, reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)