

# Module 11: Landscape Design



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Welcome to the Iowa Certified Nursery Professional Training program  
Module 11: Landscape Design.

## Module Objectives

1. Be able to explain the benefits of a landscape design.
2. Describe the design process.
3. Recognize and describe the qualities of a well-designed landscape.
4. Identify the resources necessary to achieve a well-designed landscape.

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This module has 4 objects and upon completion you will be able to fulfill each of the objectives listed below.

1. Be able to explain the benefits of a landscape design.
2. Describe the design process.
3. Recognize and describe the qualities of a well-designed landscape.
4. Identify the resources necessary to achieve a well-designed landscape.

## Goals of Well-designed Landscape

- Please the owners by reflecting their personality and values
- Function logically
- Fit the physical conditions of the site
- Match the spirit of the place
- Enhance the quality of life
- Be visually attractive

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The goals of a well-designed landscape are to please the homeowners by reflecting their personality and values including the level of maintenance they are willing to commit and the size of their budget. The plan must also function logically and fit the physical conditions of the site. You want the landscape to match the spirit of the property, enhance the quality of life and be visually pleasing. The benefits of having a well-designed landscape will increase the value of the property, enhance the beauty of the home and property and maximize the use of outdoor space.

# The Design Process

1. Gather data
  - Customer interview, site analysis
2. Lay out functional areas
  - Base plan, conceptual diagram (bubble diagram)
3. Develop preliminary design
4. Master plan and final design

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The design process is a series of steps refined through years of experience by thousands of designers. Following these steps makes the process much more successful. It involves, in order, gathering the necessary data, laying out functional areas, developing a framework or skeleton of the landscape, and finally selection of the plants. This process results in a series of increasingly detailed decisions. By following the steps, you limit the number and types of decisions that must be made at each point in the process.

# 1. Data Gathering Step

- Client interview
  - Who, what, where, when, why, how much
- Site analysis
  - Topography, drainage, soil, existing vegetation, natural features, climate, structures, sidewalks/drives, extensional landscape

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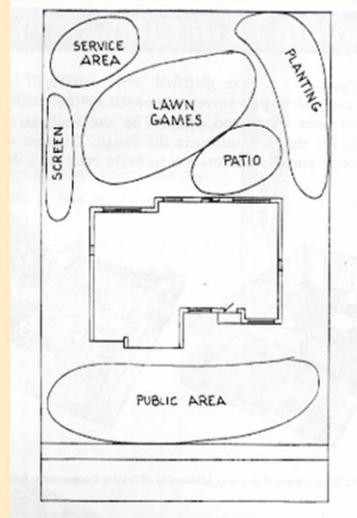
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It is important during this step to develop a good relationship with the customer. As a designer, you need to sell your ability to design their landscape, before you get the chance to sell the design. At this first meeting you do need to gather some essential information about your new client. You want to know who will be using the landscape and what activities they might engage in. You don't want to plan a beautiful flower garden if there are young kids who need to run around and play in the backyard. Also ask about pets that will need to use the area. As you get to know your client, be sure to listen. Also asked about their maintenance expectations and project budget.

The other set of information you need to gather at this meeting is about the site itself. You'll need to know where there are property lines, electric lines, buildings, existing plants, walks, driveways to name a few. Also take note of views to emphasize (like a view towards the mountains) or those that should be screened (like into the neighbor's junkyard). Having a plan of the house with window and door locations is also helpful so you can maximize the homeowner's enjoyment of the landscape.

## 2. Lay out functional areas

- Draw base map
  - Use site analysis and client information
- Conceptual or bubble diagram
  - Public area
  - Private area
  - Service area



After you gather all the data from the site and the client, the first thing you should do is draw a base map. The base map should include the location of the property lines, utilities, the house with window and door locations, existing trees and other structures or features that will remain in the final design. Ask the homeowner if they have a plat map or plot map that you could copy and use as the foundation of your design.

The next step is to layout possible locations for the different features needed by the client. To save yourself the trouble of redrawing the base map each time, lay a piece of tracing paper over the base map and draw your concepts on that. Try many different combinations of lawn, garden and hardscape areas. Include large landscape features like shade trees, patios, playgrounds on the bubble plan. That way you're sure they have enough space to be functional in the landscape. One way to organize the different spaces is by using the concepts of outdoor rooms.

# Outdoor “Room” Concept

- Breaks the landscape into smaller areas with common purposes and features
  - Public
  - Private (or Living)
  - Service



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The outdoor room concept helps divide the landscape into smaller areas that share common purposes and features. There are three areas or rooms that should be included: the public space, the private or living space and the service space. Each “room” will be described in more detail as we continue.

# Components of Public Area

- Front yard
- Curb appeal
- Plantings should frame house
  - Consider how the plants will grow and cover the house



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The public area is the front yard. This area is what people who walk by, drive by or come to visit will see first. Plantings in the public area should frame the house, soften the corners of the building and be inviting. Place large trees at 45-degree angles from the corners of the house so you don't block the front door. Be sure that visitors approaching the house know where the front door is and how to get there. Make a path or walk from the street to the front door clear and accessible.

# Components of Private Area

1. Enclosures
  - Fences or plants
  - Create privacy from neighbor
2. Plantings
  - Aesthetics and soul-satisfying
3. Surface area
  - Turf, patio, deck
  - Must accommodate use



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The private or general living area is typically the backyard. This is like the living or family room inside the house: it's where the family gathers to play and spend time together. There are several features that are common in the private living area. Enclosures like fences or plantings create privacy. Be sure to select plants that make your client happy. The plantings should be soul-satisfying and aesthetically pleasing. There are typically several different types of surfaces, including lawn areas, patios or decks. The type of surface you select should reflect the intended use of that area. If the client has young kids, you'll want to be sure the surfaces are durable and accommodate their play needs. If the client loves to entertain your design should include a large patio area where many people can gather and socialize.

## Component of the Service Area



1. Screen from view
2. Storage space for equipment and materials
  - Mower, wheel barrow, compost pile, mulch
3. Easily accessible

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The service area is a very important but often over looked part of a well designed landscape. This is where you keep your lawn mower, wheel barrow, compost pile, extra mulch and other garden essentials that aren't necessarily attractive. Your client's interest in gardening and maintaining their own landscape will help you decide how much space to allocate for the service area. If they really want a big vegetable garden and a compost pile to recycle their yard waste, then you'll probably need a bigger service area. If they're going to pay somebody to maintain the landscape, then you probably don't need a very big space. The nature of the service area doesn't make it particularly attractive, so screen the area from view with a privacy fence or hedge planting. Also, be sure there is a path that is easy to drive a lawn mower or wheel barrow over that leads to the service area entrance.

### 3. Develop preliminary design

- After you've arrange the general spaces
- More specific details about elements
  - Size of patio, adequate space for kids to play, etc.
  - Select theme
    - Rectilinear or curvilinear?
    - Symmetrical or asymmetrical?
  - Plant forms, shapes, textures, colors
    - But not specific plants yet

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Okay, back to the design process. After you've draw several concept or bubble diagrams with different options for the layout of the space, you're ready to develop the skeleton of the landscape plan. Now you need to more specifically designate the spaces for certain elements. Specify where planting beds and trees would go. Select a theme for the design. Is it going to have a formal or informal feeling? Straight, rectilinear lines or curves and sweeps? Symmetry or asymmetry? What types of plants do you want? Evergreens? Shade trees? Deciduous shrubs? Perennials? What forms, shapes, textures and colors are you looking for? Don't worry about selecting specific plants that meet those needs just yet. Continue to work with the concepts and general ideas until you nail down your preliminary design. After you've figured all this out, it's time to finalize the design and make the plant selections.

## 4. Master Plan and Final Design

- Refine the preliminary design into the master plan
  - Share with client for approval
- After approved, finalize design
  - Includes specific plant selections
  - Accurate labels

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It's important to make sure you are designing a landscape that will meet your client's needs, and who better to make that determination than your client? Share your ideas for the area with your client and listen to their response and feedback. Ultimately, they're the ones who need to love the design. It may be helpful to have some quick elevation sketches to help the customer visualize the finished effect. Also having images of materials and plants you are considering will help them imagine the finished product better.

After the client gives you the OK to move forward with the design, then you're ready to finalize the design and make specific plant selections. The level of detail required on the master plan will depend on how much construction or building needs to be done. You'll need less detail if you're installing just a planting bed than if you're installing a deck, patio and planting. Be sure everything is accurately labeled for the installation crew.

# Qualities of a Well-designed Landscape

1. Order and Balance
2. Emphasis
3. Scale
4. Unity
5. Rhythm

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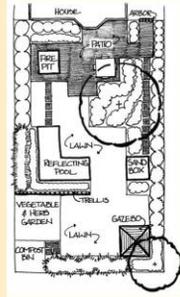
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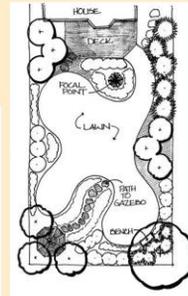
Now let's move on to the qualities of a well-designed landscape. There are five qualities of design that we will cover here: order and balance, emphasis, scale, unity, and rhythm. These qualities or principles influence how the landscape is organized and how it looks and feels. Each quality will be covered in more detail in the slides that follow.

# 1. Order and Balance

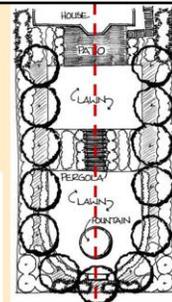
- Organize the big picture
  - Formal, informal, structured informal
  - Symmetrical or asymmetrical
- Plant in odd numbered groups
- Limit your plant palette



Structured Informal  
Asymmetrical



Informal  
Asymmetrical



Formal  
Symmetrical

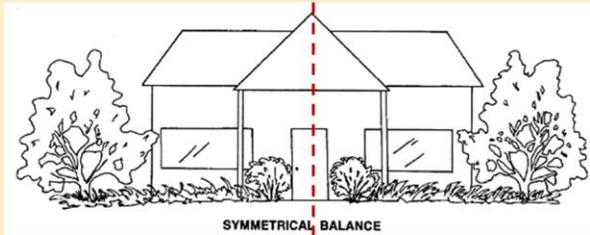
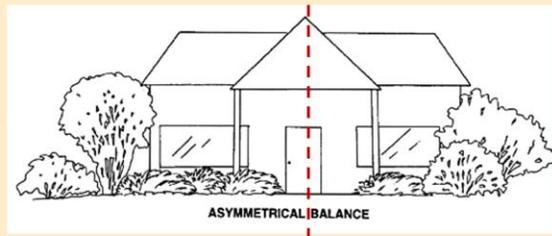
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Order and balance relate to the big picture or the overall framework of the design. The framework of the design may be formal, informal or structured informal. Balance relates to the symmetry or asymmetry of the design. You can combine types of formality and symmetry into a design framework that is unique to your client. Order and balance not only describe the overall framework, but also describe how other elements are used. Grouping plants together provides more visual order than scattering plants around the yard. When grouping plants together, work with odd number, like 3s, 5s, 7s and so on. Mass plantings provide continuity and a sense of order. If you have a love of plants, it can be tempting to put in as many different plants as possible in the design. But limit your palette, no matter how big the landscape, and you'll have a more unified and organized design.

# 1. Order and Balance



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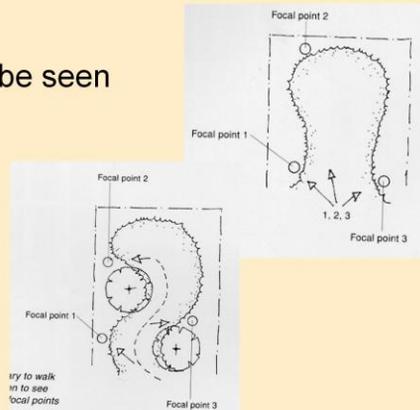
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Balance can be achieved in either a symmetrical or asymmetrical way. Symmetrical balance is easier to see because there is an axis or line that divides the space in to two mirror-image sections. In the example above, the red line splits the landscape in half and the left side is a mirror of the right. In asymmetrical balance, the exact plants or shapes is not repeated, but the visual weight of the elements is similar. In the example, the red line splits the design in half. The left half has a larger shrub and a smaller one. They are balanced on the right half by the two larger shrubs.

## 2. Emphasis

- Elements have different levels of importance
- Focal points
  - Consider where they will be seen



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Emphasis helps people feel more comfortable in the landscape because there are a variety of elements with different levels of dominance or importance. Emphasis is most commonly associated with focal points. Focal points can be a special plant, a piece of art or sculpture, a structure or anything else the you want people to be drawn to. When placing focal points for emphasis in the landscape, consider where the object can be viewed from. You may have a focal point that can only be seen by rounding the corner and entering a small courtyard garden. Each landscape can have multiple focal points, but the view of them should be limited so as to not overwhelm visitors. If you can see more than one focal point at a time, your brain will be confused about what it's supposed to be looking at and there's not incentive for them to enter and explore the garden.

### 3. Scale



- Size relationship between elements
  - plants to buildings
  - plants to other plants
  - plants to people
- Must envision MATURE plant size

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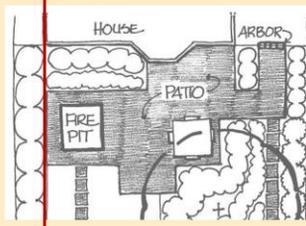
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Scale refers to the relationship between the various elements in the landscape. If the landscape overwhelms the house and property, it is too extensive or dominant for that situation. A more common situation is where a foundation planting forms a narrow ribbon of green around the house and is too small. Extend beds into the grassy space to keep the garden areas in scale with the house and buildings. A simple rule of thumb is for the depth of the beds to be equal to one third the height of the house. That means that small houses on tiny urban lots, should be landscaped with small trees and medium shrubs, while larger houses on acre lots require large shade trees and big beds. Remember that plants grow, so while considering the scale of the landscape you're designing, think about the mature size of the plant, not the size of the plant as you'll find it in the garden center.

## 4. Unity

- Link various elements together
  - Bedlines, hardscapes, building materials,
  - Plant color, texture, form



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Unity is the physical linking or tying together of various landscape elements including the house. The design should make the house and landscape fit together. Ways you can accomplish this include using materials and colors found in the house through the landscape. Use paving stones for the front walk that match the brick foundation of the house. Select flowers that are the same color as the shutters. In the drawing above, the edge of the patio area lines up with the edge of the house. This is an example of unity too. The purple flowers compliment the purple painting done on the house.

## 5. Rhythm

- Continuity in landscape
  - By repeating specific:
    - plants, colors, textures
  - By using similar lines throughout:
    - beds, hardscape, vertical elements



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Rhythm in the landscape draws people into the space and, like music, tells us how quickly to move through it. Create rhythm by repeating elements like color, texture, and specific plants. Or use similar lines in the beds, hardscapes, and vertical elements. Rhythm also creates continuity in the landscape. See how the obelisk repeats the shape to arborvitae in the background.

That concludes this module.

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That concludes this module on landscape design.