

Gardens by design

How to plan your landscape

BY JUSTIN CAVE

Do you have a problem area somewhere on your property? Is there a bald spot on your lawn or a dip that holds water after it rains? Is your yard not up to par with the rest of the neighborhood?

Artists start a painting with a clean canvas; writers begin with a blank sheet of paper. However, a landscape designer rarely starts with a bare lot or clean slate. Even on a new-construction home, the site dictates a lot of the landscaping possibilities.



Caption

Different soil conditions, grade changes, the amount of shade, drainage issues and budget constraints can play a part in planning your landscape. Landscaping can be a fairly big task that consumes a lot of precious time, energy and money. So before you hire a professional, take stock of your own landscape. After all, it's your yard. You should determine how it looks and how you use it!

Like any undertaking, it helps to start with a plan, which can help you define a budget for your project, establish areas that are a priority and make sure all the different aspects of your landscape are functional. For example, is an area for the kids and dog more important than a vegetable garden? Personal preference and function should play a part in your initial design. Invest in a 100-foot tape measure, a can of marking spray paint, some sketch paper and a pencil, and get to work!

Create a base plan

If possible, obtain your property plat. The plat will show the exact dimensions of your yard. This is going to be the sandbox that you play in! If



Caption

you don't have your plat, Greg Evans of Slate and Associates surveying says, "The easiest way to retrieve your property plat is online. Sources such as www.qpublic.net make tax maps and plats readily available."

Not only will your plat provide exact measurements to your property lines, it can also provide valuable information such as the location of gas easements and power lines. "Be particularly careful if building a fence. It is a good idea to check local codes and setbacks. If in doubt, call a surveyor to find the property lines for you. Also, it is important to contact the Georgia Utility Protection Center (www.gauipc.com) before doing any digging," Evans reiterates.

After you have found your property lines, measure every existing line on the entire property. Go the extra mile and take a few pictures of your

Product of the month

Ultra Blower Vac—This electric blower makes cleaning up your lawn a breeze. The Toro Ultra Blower Vac has more than enough power—up to 235 mph—and has a variable speed control that allows you to make adjustments for each project. It also easily converts from a blower to a vacuum by simply

removing the bottom cover and attaching the vacuum tube and bag. The blower vac is also equipped with a metal impeller that reduces several bags of leaves into a single bag.

The Ultra Blower Vac retails for \$79.99. www.toro.com. (888) 384-9939.



- Make sure all tools are sharpened and equipment is working properly.
- Make a plan or plant scheme for what you want to grow this year.
- Begin purchasing seeds for the upcoming growing season.
- Deadhead pansies to ensure good growth and extend bloom time.
- Divide your perennials.
- Prune any trees or shrubs damaged by winter storms.
- Prepare yourself! There still may be more winter ahead!

yard. These will prove to be a quick reference when back at the drawing board. But don't stop there, measure it all! Driveways, sidewalks, fences, doors, windows, existing trees and shrubs. This may sound like a lot of measuring, so find a helper to make it go faster or use a measuring wheel. The measurements will come in handy when it is time to estimate the amount of material you are going to need and how much the project is going to cost.

The next step is to take a piece of tracing paper and put it over your property plat. Trace the outline of your property. Sketch the outline of your house and try to place it exactly where it sits on the property. Pencil in all the other measurements you have taken. Don't forget to include existing trees and shrubs. Include any exits or entrances, as well as windows. Once this is finished, you have successfully completed your base map!

Put your thoughts on paper

Now that you have your base plan done, you can start to dream. Run off a dozen or so copies of your base plan and place the tracing paper over it. It is easy to dream on paper, so transfer your thoughts onto a piece of tracing paper. Don't be afraid to put your first draft in the wastepaper basket and start over if you don't like what you see! Add your wants and ideas for the space you have. Do you like the pleasure of home-grown tomatoes? If so, find a good place in your yard for a vegetable garden. Do you need a contained area for the dogs? If you have pets, you should consider this, or Fido could make a mess out of your annual beds. If you have children, include a play area for them as well.

Create circles or balloon-shaped markings on your tracing paper that show the specific areas. This will help you visualize your design con-

cept. Do you want some patio space in the back yard to enjoy coffee or evening sunsets? If so, pencil it in! Draw a bigger circle for hardscape areas such as a patio, sidewalk, driveway or a water features and a smaller circle for a perennial or shade garden. Drawing different-sized shapes will begin to help you feel a sense of dimension and scale for your space, both of which are important design elements.

If you find that you are getting writer's block, or you just don't feel

Kids, submit your Fourth of July art!

Hey kids! What does July 4th mean to you? **Draw or paint how you celebrate the holiday or how you choose to show your patriotism.** Enter your design for a chance to win cash prizes!

Winning kids' artwork will be published in the July 2008 issue of *GEORGIA Magazine*. Winners will receive \$100 for 1st place, \$50 for 2nd and \$25 for 3rd. Winners will be chosen from each of these age groups: 5 and under, 6-8 and 9-12.

Submit paintings or drawings on unlined paper no larger than 8-1/2 x 11 inches (no 3-D art, please). Be sure to include your name, phone number and address, child's age and electric co-op, if a member. Photos of entrants are welcome. Send to Attn: July 4th Art Contest, *GEORGIA Magazine*, P.O. Box 1707, Tucker, GA 30085 by **May 1, 2008**, to be eligible. (Entries and photos become the property of the magazine.)



Overflow from Garden



confident enough, don't worry! That's what the design process is all about ... doing your homework! Drive around town or your neighborhood and look for landscapes you find attractive. Visit local garden shows to find plants that you want in your landscape. Check out the Southeastern Flower Show this year, Jan. 30-Feb. 3, at the Georgia World Congress Center (www.flowershow.org).

If you are still in doubt, call a professional. Atlanta-based landscape designer Todd Guilmette of Unique Environmental (www.unique-environmental.com) says, "The consultation process can save homeowners a lot of time and headaches. Designers and architects visualize the future of your landscape." Larger hardscape projects may require more detailed construction drawings as well. These should be professionally drawn in order to obtain permits and order materials.

Create a final plan

After you have surveyed your yard and drawn a rough sketch, you can begin to put your plan into action. A can of marking spray paint is a good tool that can help you visualize actual lines in your yard such as planting beds, lawn and patio space. There's a lot to consider when it comes to a full-blown landscape project. Executing your project in phases can make the job less of a task as well as help with budget constraints. With the research you have done and the plans you have drawn, you can go into a project with confidence! If you are still in doubt, hire a pro. They can help ease the process and save you from making costly mistakes. 🍌

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