

Divine Design – Tips for Creating Your Dream Home by Sara Shragal

Create a breathtaking, professionally landscaped yard without hiring a professional

We all want an exquisitely landscaped yard that makes the neighbors envious, but sometimes getting the entire job done professionally does not provide the most return on your investment. Sure, laying sod might be a job too daunting to tackle solo, but there are other ways to get the look you want and save some money in the process.

Planning is the first rung on the ladder of any home improvement project and landscaping is no different. So grab some paper and start sketching out your ideas – this will help you narrow down your choices for plants, trees and flowers based on their growing requirements and the space you have allotted. If you have a deck or patio, be sure to consider how your landscaping will merge with these structures to provide that essential transition between your yard and home.

Once you have your plan in place, you can begin conceptualizing your backyard haven using some time-tested professional tips. One of the unspoken secrets of the pros is to include plenty of layering in your design. While using layers of plants isn't the only design trend or secret out there, it is the one that makes the largest impact on how spectacular your garden or yard will look. So how should you use layers?

Here's an example: First, position any bulky shrubs or tall, willowy Cypress-type trees in the background because eventually you'll place flowers and smaller plants in front of these. I like to call this the "class photo" theory – taller students in the back, followed by those of medium height and, finally, the not-so-tall in the front.

Let's explore your options now that you've situated your tallest shrubs adjacent to any back barrier or hedge of your yard. Consider using a small pink-tipped flowering tree in front of the hedge, along with several dwarf boxwoods – which is great for shaping into unique hedging. Complement both layers with a bench, birdbath, awning, lattice, sculpture or pergola to polish off the look.

Other considerations in creating your horticulture haven are the seasons. You'll want to select flowering plants that bloom during different times of the year, and distribute them throughout your landscaping so that you have even color all year long. There are a number of options for infusing autumn color into your yard, including shrubs, evergreens and vines that can extend your garden through the winter months.

Trellises and garden arbors, for example, can provide winter landscaping that won't shudder under the burden of heavy snow or gusty winds. The corners of your backyard are also fantastic for imaginative landscaping and, therefore provide excellent locations for ivy-covered trellises coupled with crimson-colored flowering shrubs, or even a water garden. The sights and sounds of running water really improve the calming properties of your yard. From fountains to ponds, and everything in between, there's a water feature to fit any budget.

For the perfect finishing touches, edge your yard with planted bulbs, colorful flora or fruit-bearing plants that boast a decorative branching structure to have your neighbors “green” with envy in no time.

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