



Elements of a landscape design

In last week's column, I talked about the importance of having a landscape design plan when building a new home or updating the look of your current residence. Today's column is geared toward the elements of your design plan.

Designing a landscape is akin to creating a piece of art. Design uses line, texture and form to transform a space. Unlike a painting, a landscape is experienced as a person moves through various spaces.

There are five primary elements of design, including mass, form, line, texture and color. Mass, form and line are the concepts that organize the space, while texture and color play supporting roles by adding interest and richness to the space.

Mass is the space or area occupied by an object. This could be a house or other structures, as well as mass plantings and individual plants. As odd as it sounds, even empty spaces occupy a distinct area. As your design comes together, the individual components and groups of components become very important.

The shape of objects in the landscape, as well as the relationships of objects to each other, is referred to as form. The landscape itself has form, both natural and man-made. The house, walkways and driveways portray various shapes, as do plants, slopes and other natural elements. Plants also have individual form, such as pyramidal, rounded, oval, columnar, vase, flat or spreading. These various forms can evoke different feelings. Rectangular feels orderly and formal, circles are soft, triangles are strong and irregular shapes appear more casual and free. When plants are placed in groupings, they take on a new form as a group. In most cases, the form of the plant group is more important than the individual plant form.

Line refers to the movement of the eye through the landscape and is one of the most important aspects of design. Line determines how the beds and paths flow together. There are different types of line. Straight lines are more formal, while curved lines are gentle and natural. Jagged lines can be exciting or distracting. Keep line in mind when shaping beds and walkways and when choosing hardscape elements such as fences, walking paths and driveways.

Texture describes the physical characteristics of a material relative to other materials in the landscape. A plant with a coarse texture features large leaves or flowers and a bold appearance. On the other hand, a fine-textured plant has small leaves and flowers and a soft, delicate look. Other landscape materials such as stone, metal or wood can have fine or coarse textures based upon the relative size of each element. A landscape should include more fine textures than coarse

textures to provide a soft background that contrasts with more pronounced coarse elements in the landscape.

Although it's an important design element, color is often given too much attention. Line, form and mass are the building blocks of a garden. Color is used to add interest and evoke emotion. Warm colors such as red, orange and yellow give a feeling of warmth and excitement. Green and blue are cool colors that are calming, while also making objects look smaller and farther away. Purple is multi-purpose in that it looks warm next to cool colors and cool next to warm colors. White is used for contrast and to separate conflicting colors. Darker colors seem to move away from the viewer, while bright colors jump out and grab your attention.

Color can be used to direct focus in the landscape, but if misused, it can be distracting. How colors are combined impacts how individual colors appear. Consider these types of groupings:

- Monochromatic: Use the same color as the base planting, along with flowers and foliage in lighter colors and shades of darker colors.
- Polychromatic: This scheme combines many colors in a single setting, including various shades and tints.
- Complementary: Colors that appear opposite to one another on a color wheel look better together than they do by themselves.
- Analogous: This color scheme uses colors that are adjacent on a color wheel.

Next week's column will cover the principles of design.