



Sowing Seeds of Knowledge Reaps Conservation with Beauty

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Horticulture Edition

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GCG, Inc. Mission: Beautification ... Conservation ... Education

Horticulture magazines can be a great resource of information for a variety of topics devoted to the garden—and dreaming of newer and newer more interesting plants, more effective landscape design, solutions to control disease, sustainability. Magazines from reliable sources plus information from Google, and current editions of horticulture books are valuable tools to improve our horticulture skills. Added to these excellent sources are the schools offered by GCG, Inc. through NGC Inc. A Gardening Studies School is starting in Rome in November—these are always outstanding. Check with the Events Calendar on GCG website for opportunities and dates for other schools. Questions and problems can also be addressed by your County Extension Agents and UGA Extension Agents.

Garden Design

The garden (vegetable, ornamental, or a combination of vegetable and ornamental plants; can be a ‘hodgepodge’ of casual favorite plants or a controlled design—both styles are equally lovely but different! No matter which category (or something in-between) describes your style it will include very basic design ‘rules’—Line, Shape and Form, Texture, Size, Balance, Repetition, Focal Points, Transition, Rhythm, Unity. All these factors support ‘Good Design.’ How does your garden fit into at least some of these design factors? As we move into the fall/winter season it is a good time to consider where and where not our garden follows some of these basic ‘rules’ and consider changes in your design.

- Line--the ‘bones’ of the garden—the drive way edge, a sidewalk, well defined garden beds...some are straight, some are curved.

- Shape and Form—height and width creates shape; three dimensions create form. Shape is rather limited, but Form provides interest and ‘creativity.’ Think about the many different shapes of plants and flowers. Some are angular, some are rounded, some may be triangles, a variety of shapes gives a garden interest/character.
- Texture creates variety—think of the many ways leaves feel, smooth, rough, velvety
- Balance—you certainly don’t want all the big trees and shrubs at one end of the bed with all the pretty little flowers at the other now do you! Obviously, this is an extreme example, but it describes really bad balance!
- Repetition—provides continuity and interest. Variety can be the spice of the garden but repetition allows the variety to have sensible order.
- Focal Points—exclamation marks for the garden—we all like a little surprise, but not too many surprises or we are overwhelmed.
- Scale and Proportion—A huge *Magnolia grandiflora* surrounded by a dainty flower.

Magnolia grandiflora

(*Southern Magnolia*)



Anemone hupehensis
(*Japanese Anemones*)



- Transition—the gradual change from one plant/shrub/tree to another to create a rhythmic flow both vertical and horizontal. Referring back to the ridiculous example of the anemone and the magnolia I tried to think of a ‘transitional’ shrub to use to blend the two diametrically opposed genus but was unsuccessful—but that is what is needed to accomplish a good ‘design.’ Can you think of anything?

- Rhythm—is the factor that is missing in the lack of transition in the example of the anemone and the magnolia! This is a ridiculous example but it truly demonstrates scale, proportion, transition, and rhythm.
- Unity describes the condition in which all the principles and elements of landscaping work together!

Are we infringing on Landscape Design? Probably, but there are other elements to consider—in choosing plants for the landscape, especially the more permanent trees, shrubs, and perennials we must also understand the environmental conditions such as soil quality, climate, hydration, fertility, topography, light conditions, sustainability through the years. The topic involves horticulture and its many details. Books, quality magazines, google searches from well documented sites (Clemson University, Missouri Botanical Garden, and of course UGA are all excellent resources available on the web.) NGC Schools such as Gardening Study, Environmental Study, and Landscape Design are available to both members of GCG and non-members. Master Gardener training is outstanding. For more information about Master Gardening Schools contact Georgia Master Gardeners on Google. A good nursery, knowledgeable gardeners, and your own trial and error are all excellent guides. Good luck! It is a wonderful journey.

Common Sense Gardening

Bob Westerfield is an Extension Horticulturist with UGA and is a very ‘down to earth’, rational gardener. Good sense and logic are practiced by him in his professional and personal gardens, and in his teaching or advising. His article in *Georgia Gardening* October 2015, “Stay Mindful” considers garden trends over the past 25 years which are gradually moving to a more environmentally appropriate style. He states it might relate to the 9/11 tragedy which made us more aware of the world’s vulnerability and the importance of protecting our heritage. The use of herbicides and pesticides and chemical fertilizers is no longer a common practice; ‘home vegetable gardens’ are more common; sustainability is a common concern; we are more aware of protecting our resources and our health. Water conservation, planting to provide food and shelter for wildlife, use of native plants, appreciating the beauty that is around us—all these standards have changed in just a relatedly short time. “Beautification, Education, Conservation”—GCG

Inc. motto is being practiced. Bob Westerfield uses the description of ‘Conscientious Gardening’ to describe the changing attitudes in current methods—read the labels and following the directions on commercial horticulture products, think about the long term effects of gardening practice, compost waste products (and then use the compost!), protect and encourage pollinators. “The bottom line is to use common sense when gardening and understand that what we do can positively or negatively affect the environment and others.” Bob Westerfield, Extension Horticulturist.

Basic Organic Lawn Maintenance

The previous information covers Common Sense Gardening and has overtones of Environmental Studies information combined with Gardening Studies concepts—this information will definitely more into the realm of Environmental Studies—but lawn care is most definitely a factor in establishing and maintaining a garden. (Does this information really emphasize the dependence on each area—Landscape Design, Environment, and Gardening Study—with each of the topics?)

The American Gardener September/October 2015 gives us information in the article, “How to Grow a Truly “Green Lawn” (using green the color as a description of an environmental lawn) A list of ideal objectives to achieve this goal include achievable suggestions:

- Good soil is essential
 - This ideal rarely exists but can be created (In Georgia the extreme examples range from hard pan to sand. Warning: just adding sand to hard pan is not the answer! The wrong kind of sand will just make it turn to concrete.)
 - Have the soil tested by a reliable horticulture laboratory is the very first step to learn facts about what will be needed to achieve ‘good soil’
 - For a new lawn incorporate compost, organic material; encourage earthworms, microorganisms; follow the guidelines from the soil test
 - If the lawn is ‘established’ but in bad condition (full of weeds, wild grasses etc.) it can be revitalized with patience

- ✿ Aerate—introduce oxygen into the soil!—how? Depending on size of the lawn use a devise to open holes in the soil with a garden fork, or a commercial machine designed to ‘aerate’ the soil
- ✿ Add organic material such as a thin layer of compost (1/2 inch or less twice a year) and DO NOT BAG GRASS CLIPPINGS. Compost tea can also be helpful, but realistically this is not economically feasible for a large lawn.
- ✿ Personal experience with our lawn when we moved to Georgia in 1992: Five year old lawn—builder’s quality and never maintained beyond an occasional mowing! Another factor was size—5 acres of nothing. Economics demanded serious compromises! Soil test and centipede grass seed was sowed but not properly maintained the first year. By year two we were in a position to do proper maintenance. Fertilizing in the spring, correct mowing, very little supplemental watering, weeds and barnyard Bermuda, clover were allowed to grow BUT MOWED CONSISTANTLY AT THE CORRECT HEIGHT. Did not fertilize after two years. Amazingly after 22 years the weeds are controllable, the soil is improved, the centipede grass has just about won the battle, and the lawn is as pretty as any of the weed free lawns! And after the fourth or firth year it was presentable. No chemical pesticides or herbicides were applied to the grass at any time. Trees, shrubs and flower beds were incorporated and all is well! It can be done! It is a ‘Green Lawn.’

✿ Lawn Maintenance

- ✿ Use the right grass—Clint Waltz, UGA, Griffin recommends drought-tolerant grasses such as bermuda and centipede (not barnyard burmuda!) *Tiftuf* (developed at UGA Tipton) is recommended—it

requires even less water and stays green instead of going dormant.

- ✿ Proper mowing techniques include mowing at the correct height for the conditions and grass variety
 - Warm season grass used in Georgia should be mowed at one to two inches. During hot weather mow at the higher level—this provides shade for the roots and shade discourages weed seeds from germinating!
 - Use a sharp blade! Dull blade will rip the grass, not cut it
 - Do not bag the grass clippings—the clippings will enrich and improve the soil. This assumes you mow consistently and grass is not allowed to grow too high
 - ✿ Fertilizing should be accomplished with organic materials such as blood meal, aged animal manure, fish emulsion, gluten meal—these are all natural products. Be considerate of whatever is downstream from your property because all sorts of really nasty chemical fertilizers etc. byproducts wash down stream and do harm.
 - ✿ (This is a personal aside about mowing—my husband, the grass man, says he learned to enjoy the diversity of weeds—always had something new to mow every week! From henbit in the early spring, through wild onions mid-season, to crab grass in later summer.)
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Tasks to Accomplish as the Season Changes to Autumn

Let's get back to just horticulture, but not forget all three disciplines are interconnected.

- Spring flowering perennials are most successfully moved this time of the year (though time is running out—do it very shortly because the roots need time to adjust prior to the first freeze approximately mid-November

depending on where in Georgia you live; remember Mother Nature is also fickle—early freeze or late freeze is always possible.)

■ Some suggestions to follow include:

- ✿ Have the replanting area ready to receive the plants
 - ✿ Use the new seedlings to establish the new planting
 - ✿ Make sure ample water is supplied as the new plants establish themselves and then again in the heat of summer
 - ✿ There are two types of plants to consider: ‘clumpers’ which are plants that multiply by adding new plants to the ‘mother plant’; ‘spreaders’ are those plants which add new plants by new roots running from the original plant. To divide these by slicing with a spade and start at the edge of the mass, dig under and around the piece you want and lift gently. Replant in its new position—if you are happy with the ‘mother plant’ in current location it will continue to grow there, or it can be moved
 - ✿ Don’t use ANY herbicide close to new baby plants—I lost all my beautiful asters this way this spring—two bad ideas—divided them in the early spring plus using some herbicide on some weeds in the vicinity of the asters. I should know better!
 - ✿ Some candidates for early fall division include: Artemisia, Gailardia, Coreopsis, Hemericallis, Hosta, perennial Aster, Sedum, Phlox paniculata, Achillea/Yarrow, Iberis, Dianthus, Perovskia (Russian Sage) This is of course not a complete list but a good idea of what should be divided now. In fact I have some Russian Sage and had not considered it a candidate for moving—guess I’ll do some of that tomorrow!
- Mulching is always a good idea in the late fall—let the ground get cold before adding new mulch. By mulching too early plants will continue to grow because the warmth of summer is all cozy under the new mulch and this can cause the plant grow again and could suffer a fatal freeze or at least be damaged—especially true with trees and shrubs.
- Fall pruning should be finished by now. The new foliage which results from pruning must have time to harden off before the late fall/early winter freezes occur.

It is time to relax, evaluate, plan, and enjoy the autumn weather, the changing colors of leaves, the glory of the garden.

A favorite retort I sometimes mention to my fellow Flower Show School ‘graduates’ who prefer ‘design’ over ‘horticulture’ is to remember without horticulture and gardeners there would be no material for design—but we should be thankful for each discipline. Beauty is added to our world, and we are happier for this fact.

Happy Gardening,

Gail

The Happy Gardener

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