Planning the Home Grounds for Beauty and Comfort: By Ralph Rodney Root, B.S.A.

The work of a landscape architect of today does not consist merely, as many people suppose, in designing flower-beds of intricate pattern; neither does it imply the haphazard planting of specimen plants about the lawn. While it is true that the use of trees, shrubs, vines and flowers is an important factor, the solution of the problem does not depend upon planting alone. This fact is well illustrated in Italian gardens, whose charm depends almost wholly upon the architectural features. Often, too, it is necessary to take out plants instead of planting new ones, or in the case of remodeling an estate, plants already established must be reset in order to relate them to the new design.

In properly designing the garden features for a new home the landscape architect will carefully study the general character of the proposed developments. Then with a survey plan drawn to scale, showing the size, shape and general lay of the land as regards grades, the location of any buildings already standing, the existing natural growth, he has the necessary data to begin his problem. During his first visit he notes the direction of the best views and indicates on his plan the points from which these views can be seen to the best advantage, and also takes note of any important natural features, such as trees and rocks. He then roughly sketches the proposed house plan with due reference to all of these matters, the shape of the plan being determined by the most important views or the contour of the land. By working out the plan of the house in this way the service wing of the house can be located so that it will correspond to the service portion of the grounds and the living rooms of the house will be in direct relation to the private lawns and gardens.

Having decided definitely upon the size, shape and orientation of the house the plan is drawn to the same scale as that of the survey plan, and then with his problem fairly before him the landscape architect is ready to begin the real design for the home grounds. This problem is worked out from the standpoint of composition, making the several divisions—lawns, gardens, carriage court, service yard, laundry yard, the various paths and the location of buildings, such as a garage or stable, all fit together in one scheme. The location of the paths, drives and general planting masses all come out gradually, the design
being worked out as a rough sketch, and from this the first plan or sketch is made. The client, the landscape architect and the architect can now go over this plan together and come to an agreement about the outline plan of the proposed house and upon this the architect can base his plans for the house. The landscape architect then draws up the preliminary plan, making such changes as were decided upon during his interview with the client and the architect. After further consultation with the client in regard to any other changes, he prepares the final or general plan, and much depends upon this plan, for upon it are based the engineering or grading plans and the planting plans. Thus the plant design in regard to the location and general outlines of the planting masses is not a separate part, but is very intimately related to the entire subject of landscape architecture.

In working out the composition of the sketch plan the plant masses have been used as the darks and the open spaces as the lights in the design. The location of many of these dark masses has, of course, been determined by the fact that it may be necessary to screen certain portions from others, or from the street or public portions of the grounds; but the relation of their size has, however, been determined by the proportion of one to another.

It is only after the architect has finished the elevation sketches of the house that the plant design can be begun. As the structure of this has already been determined in the preliminary and general plans, it can now be taken directly from them. The dominance of the more important masses will be brought out by using specially selected plants. To achieve this result the plants must be selected not only from the standpoint of proper mass effects, but with due consideration to correct height, color
of flower, size and texture of leaf. All the plants are, of course, selected with reference to environmental conditions—soil, climate and rainfall.

When, however, the house has been built before the landscape architect was consulted, the problem to a certain extent becomes one of plant design alone. In this case the landscape architect will visit the place with the owner and make observations much as in the first instance, except that although he cannot change the location of the house he will always determine where it ought to be in relation to views and other factors that would govern its correct location. In working out the landscape plan this information is used in locating gardens, terraces or summer houses that are to furnish vistas or viewpoints or, better yet, to serve to bring the house into a more friendly relation with its surroundings by moving shrub masses or cutting down trees.

With a plan showing the location of the house and garden features the landscape architect begins the redesigning of the property. The first sketch plan is worked out much as the one in the first instance and the preliminary sketch is drawn up. In working out this design from the standpoint of composition, the problem becomes a very difficult one, and in order to bring the several unrelated parts of the plan into harmony the landscape architect often has to solve it by the use of adaptive composition. In this case the different parts of the design are changed in size and location, and then by the use of shrub masses or screens covered with vines, they are all given the proper emphasis. The plants are used to fill out bad angles, and sometimes plant masses are unavoidably thin because of lack of space due to awkward placing of drives and walks. Instead of the architect's sketches of the house elevations, photographs of the existing buildings are used, and sometimes another problem is how to screen or hide bad points in the house design. Then the general plan is prepared, and afterward the engineering and planting plans are made.

It is not, however, correctly designed and planted grounds that receive the most
critical attention, as often the entire effect and will be caught at a glance, enjoyed as a single picture or composition, and no attempt will be made to analyze even the placing of a single tree or shrub. When, however, the grounds have been planted in a haphazard fashion, attention will at once be attracted to the unrestful appearance of the bad points in design and planting; and the good points will not be appreciated simply because the place is not seen as a single picture, but as a number of unrelated things—a tree here, a vase there, and perhaps, because of the bad selection of trees and shrubs, the house will be seen from its most unattractive aspect only. This is the reason that many of our best architects are so willing to cooperate with landscape architects, for many a future commission depends upon the appearance of the houses they have already designed. All this will be more intelligible if some concrete example is shown, and I shall take up what can be called, perhaps, the average condition of the “undesigned” home grounds and give some illustrations to show how the problem would be worked out by a landscape architect.

The place in question is a corner lot, and while there is little change in elevation on the property the grade of the street at the east side has been lowered until there is a difference of four feet between the level of the street and the rear corner of the lot. Because of this a retaining wall was built along the east boundary of the property. The first plan shows the conditions existing before the landscape architect was called in to “improve” the grounds. No attention whatever has been given to the arrangement of the several portions of the grounds with regard to design. The plans for the house had been made without regard to topography or views. After the house was built, it was found that a driveway to the service portion of the grounds was needed and one was immediately constructed. Now as the guests ought not to enter through the kitchen, a second driveway was necessary, and thus more than one-half of the ground area was taken up by the drives. Besides the service drive entrance to the kitchen there was also a service path along the west side of the house. To use this path it was necessary to go up the front steps and along the terrace walk, as shown on the plan. The gardener was given charge of the “im-

provements,” and palm trees and flowerbeds were added, as he said, “to embellish the grounds.” The fine groups of cocos plumosa near the southwest corner of the lot and the eucalyptus trees at the rear were there when the house was built. As the gardener’s work went on, the family began to adapt itself to the new house and grounds. The warm climate of California renders the porch one of the most comfortable parts of the house, and as there was great need of protection from the sun and of a greater seclusion from the street, a screen was planted along the east side of the house. Little by little additions to the planting were made, with the results shown in the first plan and the photographs of existing conditions. Here are a good collection of palms, shrubs, vines and other plants with a house in the center, each thing in itself having no relationship with any of the others. Each stands alone without any hope of ever becoming a part of a single scheme in which all the separate plants might help to bring out a dominant idea or thought.

At this point the landscape architect was consulted about a few “improvements” in the grounds, with perhaps a new plan for the flower garden. After a careful study
of the problem, a survey was made and the survey plan drawn, as shown in the illustration. From the data on this plan and the notes taken of the requirements of the problem, a sketch was drawn showing the proposed rearrangement. While the new design is not ideal as regards the several divisions of the estate, it is at least an improvement on the old. One of the questions receiving first consideration in the new design had been given the least attention in the first layout of the grounds, that of driveways. Is a driveway necessary, and if so could it not be arranged to answer the requirements of service and family or guests? Should it be in front or at the back of the house? As the original driveway was also a service one, by using the front steps and terrace this could also be used in the same way for the new plan. But this is both inconvenient for tradesmen and unpleasant for the people living in the house. A single drive to the service portion of the house, with the existing entrance conditions to the house, would be as inconvenient for the owner and his guests as the former would be for the service. By a slight change in the stairway an entrance to the rear of the house can be made through the hall by means of a new door, as shown on the second plan. This would also acquire for the living portion of the house the beautiful mountain view that has been completely shut out from these rooms.

The location of driveways having been decided the design was worked out much as in the former case, except where influenced by existing conditions that could not be changed. The grade made it necessary to design the entrance from the street, as shown in the plan. The first sketch plan was prepared and from this the general plan drawn, as shown in the illustration. A garden with its main axis in the direction of and centering on the mountain is a feature of the new plan. At the side of this a cut-flower garden and a laundry yard have been planned. The carriage court is included in the new design, and while it is really a part of the garden as seen from the house it is also quite separate from it. For upon entering the garden the view of the driveway is completely obscured, and the garden becomes a secluded place in which to enjoy the beautiful mountain view and the quiet of the enclosure. The seclusion is gained in great part by the arrangement of grades, as the carriage court is eighteen inches lower than the garden itself, thus bringing it a little below the floor level of the house. A strong line is needed at the sides of the garden and a hedge gives this emphasis. The carriage court is sheltered by a simple vine-covered lattice; lack of space rendered heavier planting impossible, and the lattice also serves to bring the water-tower, service yard and the laundry yard into a closer relationship. A terrace has been constructed around the house in order to conceal the incorrect placing of the house as regards the first floor grade. This terrace is to be given a simple wall treatment that will make it an attractive part of the home grounds. In front of the house a straight walk has been provided in place of the curved drive. This not only adds dignity to the design, but is of greater convenience. The grading plan was next worked out, and after the ground surface about the house has been changed to correspond with that suggested by the landscape architect, the planting plan will be begun.

A tracing will be made of the general plan showing the various features of the
BEAUTY IN THE HOME GROUNDS

Sketch Plan of Proposed Improvement Scheme

Design and the outlines of the shrubbery beds, and then the shrubs will be selected. As many of the existing plants as practicable will be used in the new planting scheme, but if it is found that any of the palms and other trees or shrubs are out of harmony they will be discarded. While, like a dictionary, a collection of plants is of value in its place, a too comprehensive assortment of plants would be inappropriate for a place of this size. The selection and correct arrangement of growing things are important in the small place, not the number of kinds that may be planted. In selecting plants in regard to their general character, the cocos plumosa in the front and the eucalyptus trees in the rear were used as the “touchstones” of the planting scheme. This means that the plants chosen for the front of the property are more quiet in outline and color and those in the rear of the house are more irregular in outline and the colors more striking. As the work progresses rough sketches will be prepared from time to time to show the general outline, texture and color value of the important plant groups and their relation to the house and views. Having decided these points, the planting of the several portions of the grounds beginning at the front of the house will be taken up.

In what is called the public portions of the estate the plants must not be too conspicuous or of species that require close inspection, for they are to be seen and enjoyed only from a distance. In selecting the plants, first those which give the mass to the bed or group must be chosen, and then those that furnish accent or color. For the mass shrubs, then, the following are selected for the group marked (A) on the plan, and the other groups as shown in the same way.

Group A, mass shrubs: Euonymus Japonicus, evergreen euonymus; berberis Darwinii, Darwin’s barberry; choisya ternata, Mexican orange; raphiolepis indica, wax flower.

Accent shrubs: Gardenia jasminoides, cape jasmine; pittosporum tobira, Japanese pittosporum; laurustinus, viburnum tinus.

Group B, mass shrubs: Euonymus Japonicus; berberis Darwinii; mahonia aquifolium, Oregon grape; ligustrum Sinense, Chinese privet; olea fragrans, fragrant olive.

Accent shrubs: Crataegus pyracantha, pyracanth thorn; gardenia jasminoides; arbutus unedo, strawberry tree.

Group C, mass shrubs: Ligustrum Sinense; berberis Darwinii; raphiolepis indica; rosa rugosa, Japanese rose; abelia grandiflora, hybrid abelia.

Accent shrubs: Pittosporum tobira; Philadelphus falconeri, falconer’s mock orange.

Group D, mass shrubs: Berberis Darwinii; ligustrum Sinense.

Accent shrubs: Berberis Darwinii; pittosporum tobira.

Group E, mass shrubs: Berberis Darwinii; escallonia rosea, South American lilac; laeagnus reflexa pungens, bronze oleaster; ligustrum Japonicum, Japanese privet.

Accent shrub: Acacia Baileyana, Bailey’s acacia.

Group F, mass shrubs: Atriplex brevieri, salt bush; olea Europea, olive tree; orange tree; ligustrum Sinense; ligustrum coriaceum, dwarf barberry.

Accent shrub: Acacia Baileyana.

Group G, mass shrubs: Mesembryanthemum australis, gray creeper; lipppa repens, ground vine; atriplex brevieri; phyllostachys aurea, golden bamboo.

Accent shrubs: Standard roses; cypress.
EXPERIMENTS IN ALFALFA PLANTING

A

sempervirens fastigiata, Italian cypress; eucalyptus citriodora, white gum.

Group H, mass shrubs: Hedera helix (used on lattice); roses (selected varieties).

Accent shrub: Camellia Japonica, evergreen rose.

The plants in the cut-flower garden (I) and those used on the terrace (J) were selected by the client, and here at any time of the year can be found flowers of almost any color or shade for cutting. The flowers used on the terrace are transplanted from time to time from the cut-flower garden, which is a sort of reserve garden.

The carriage court should be treated like a garden, for as seen from the house it is part of the garden itself. Hedera helix or English ivy is used as the background of the plant composition and roses give color and interest. In the center of the court there is a ground cover of the ivy with accents of camelia. While the plants here are intended for a sequestered garden, the method of using them to produce a special effect makes them appropriate even for the semi-public portion of the grounds.

The formal garden furnishes pleasure exclusively to the family and its guests. Here the interest centers in the mountain view with the garden as a foreground when seen from the house, and in the rare beauty of the garden. Within the garden itself the interest centers on the pool and the walks at the sides. The ground cover about the pool is soft gray lippia repens. The hedges are of the salt bush with Italian cypress at the sides, framing in the mountain view from the house and furnishing accent in the garden. Standard roses also give interest to the garden along the side paths. These plants give broad masses of color and at the same time are of such a character as to be interesting in themselves. Between the path and the hedge there is a ground cover of mesembryanthemum, and at the sides of the paths is planted a low hedge of lavender cotton. In the pool a few lotus are planted. Everything about the garden and in it has been tuned to the gray tones of the salt-bush hedge and the dark green Italian cypress gives the strong color notes.

After the plants have been selected and listed on the plan, either by numerals or names, the number of each kind and their position as to heights is shown. This plan is carefully gone over by the client and the landscape architect and all necessary changes or additions made. The plants can then be ordered from the nursery and the planting done under the personal supervision of the landscape architect.

Then the gardener can be given charge of the place, as he will know the best treatment required by each plant, and the place will begin to look like the ideal the landscape architect visualized upon his first visit to the grounds.

Instead of a promiscuous scattering of plants about the grounds the result is a single picture with the house as the central feature when seen from the street or the home grounds, and the planting well related as seen from the house. The owner can enjoy the grounds in seclusion and quiet.

EXPERIMENTAL TESTS IN ALFALFA PLANTING

EXPERIMENTS in alfalfa planting in Long Island, show that as a fertilizer alfalfa sowed on ground where crimson clover has been turned under, produces results equal to that of ten tons of manure per acre. The alfalfa planted on Long Island soil without any inoculation whatever, is fully equal to that planted on soil inoculated with laboratory culture. Tests of spring and autumn planting carried on through eight seasons varying from extreme drought to excessive rainfall show that spring planting is the best, late summer planting not so good and not to be depended on, and autumn planting a waste of time and seed. The earlier the planting in spring, the better, more vigorous and more lasting the growth.

Pasturing cattle on alfalfa during the spring and even the early summer, instead of harming the crop has been proven in Long Island to be a distinct benefit to it. But pasturing in late summer or autumn destroys it, as during and after the dry summer weather the new shoots which the alfalfa continuously puts forth are not so large or plentiful as in the moist spring weather. The cattle graze close, so that when the alfalfa growth begins to retard as the season advances, they should be taken away.

Weeds are alfalfa's great enemies, and in buying seed care should be taken to get it from a seedsman who makes sure that his seed growers work to insure pure and vigorous strains.