



Homeowner Garden Design Series: Pre-design Planning Worksheet

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The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service WE ARE OKLAHOMA

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education

for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.

- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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If you are considering undertaking a new landscape design or making changes to your current landscape, sometimes getting started is the hardest thing to do. Some homeowners hire a landscape architect to design their landscape and a contractor to install the new landscape, while others take on the entire project themselves. Whichever group you fit into, the best place to start is to assess your landscape's current condition in relation to what you want in your new, or updated, landscape.

This fact sheet contains a comprehensive list of questions that serve as a pre-professional, or homeowner design planning worksheet. If you hire a professional to design your landscape, they may ask you many of the same questions. Thinking about the questions prior to their visit will help provide them detailed information. Keep in mind that all of these questions may not relate to every landscape or homeowner. There might be questions you don't know the answers to. If that is the case, ask a landscape professional to help determine the answers.

Knowing your hopes for the new landscape is an important part of developing a landscape plan for your home. Think about each item listed below. Your ideas and notes provide a good starting point for working on the landscape plan, whether working with a design professional or developing the project on your own.

Understanding the Current Conditions

The following check list will guide your process of completing an inventory of your property's current conditions. To inventory is to take note of what you see, literally recording what is there. While you will naturally begin to analyze the information and consider the impacts, opportunities or constraints possible on the overall project design, be mindful to record the facts, so issues can be thoroughly understood and considered.

Water

- What are the effects of water on the property?
- How does water flow across the property?
- Are there any soil erosion or drainage problems that require solutions?

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<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

- Is there an existing irrigation system?
- What type of irrigation system is in place, and is it adequate?
- Where are landscape water sources and hose connections located? Are they adequate?

Property Boundaries

- Are there any questions regarding the location of the property lines?
- Do you have any existing measured plans, drawings, plot plans or a survey of your property?
- Are there easements or setback requirements?
- Are the property boundaries marked?
- Are there any covenants, codes or restrictions for the property?

Views

- Consider the views off of the property. Do you want to preserve, enhance or screen them?
- Consider the views from inside your home. Are there any specific views you want to emphasize or enhance?

Utilities

Consider where each of the following are located and how they may impact a new landscape design:

- Where is the dryer vent outlet?
- Where is the furnace and air conditioning unit located?
- Is there a septic tank or well located on the property?
- Do you know where cables are buried?
- Do overhead cables/wires limit options for the design?
- Where are the electric and water meters located?

Solar Aspect

- Are you familiar with the location of the sun rising and setting throughout the year?
- How will seasonal microclimates affect the design and planning of the landscape?

Soil

- What is the condition of the soil?
- What has been done to amend the quality of your soil in the last two years?

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Plant Material

- What is the type and quality of the existing plant material?
- Are there any plants that need relocating or removing?
- Does the current plant material exhibit proper pruning and growth structure?

Pest Management

- Is there a current problem with pests or animals?

Understanding Functional Needs

Think about the areas of the landscape as rooms in a house and consider their functional use and physical relationships. In a house, each room is an individual place with a specific purpose. The rooms in a house also have ceilings of different heights and finish materials that further define the room. In an open plan the kitchen, dining and living room have a strong connection between them. Using the analogy of designing outdoor rooms will help you create an enjoyable outdoor environment.

Functional Use Area

- Does the landscape setting meet your outdoor living space requirements?
- Is the existing patio and/or deck adequate?
- What type and size of outdoor cooking facilities is needed?
- What kind of recreational areas is needed?
- Are you considering any structural additions to the house?

Service Areas

Consider your requirements for each of the following:

- Trash container storage, compost bins, dog run/fencing, clothes line, greenhouse/potting shed, storage and/or out-buildings.

Parking

- Is the current parking configuration adequate?
- Do you need more or overflow parking for parties or special occasions?

Lighting

- Consider both the aesthetic and security lighting of the property.
- Is the existing lighting adequate?
- How will your needs change with the addition of new landscape features?

Circulation

Consider the primary and secondary paths around your property.

- Do all of the walks and paths function and relate to one another?
- Do you need more paths or fewer paths?
- Is pathway material in good condition?

Specialty or Theme Gardens

Do you want to add or renovate a specific kind of garden into the landscape setting?

- Vegetable garden
- Rose garden
- Cut flower garden
- Herb garden
- Other

Features or Accessories

Are you considering adding any of the following to the garden or landscape setting?

- Arbor/trellis/ pergola
- Waterfall or Pond (natural/ formal)
- Birdbath
- Tennis Court
- Children's Play Area
- Swimming Pool
- Decorative or Screen Fencing
- Patio/Deck
- Entrance Gate
- Stone Feature/Boulders
- Potting Shed
- Security or Decorative Lighting
- Gazebo
- Sculpture or Statuary
- Lawn Games
- Retaining Walls
- New or Resurfaced Driveway
- Recreational Vehicle Storage
- Out-building Storage
- Workshop

Defining Landscape Aesthetics

Landscape design styles are very closely linked with architecture and cultural context. Each style varies in the way the design principles organize the features and what plant material is selected.

Garden Concept or Style

Do you have an idea about the overall look or feeling you want to achieve?

- Formal Estate
- Quiet Reflection/Sanctuary Garden
- Prairie Inspired Garden
- Chinese Garden
- English Cottage Garden
- French Formal Garden
- Italian Tuscan Garden
- Japanese Garden
- Modern Garden
- Southwestern Garden
- Country Garden
- Memory Garden
- Perennial Garden

Do you have an environmental or ecological goal you want to achieve?

- Butterfly Garden
- Edible Garden
- Healing Garden
- Herb Garden
- Wildlife Garden
- Xeriscape Garden

Plant Material /Plant Aesthetics

List specific plants you like or dislike:

- Trees
- Shrubs
- Groundcovers

- Annuals
- Perennials
- Native plant material
- Lawn
- Other

Hardscape Preference

Consider each existing hardscape element and feature with respect to life span or durability, functionality and aesthetics. Make choices that complement your landscape style. Select materials that coordinate with each other, the exterior of the house and the landscape design style.

Whether natural stone or handcrafted pavers is preferred, think about the color, texture and pattern they add to the outdoor living space and select carefully. Often, more than two to three textures, colors or materials tends to look messy and distracts from the overall aesthetic of the new landscape.

Photo File

Collect photographs from magazines and books that appeal to you. They will serve to clarify your desire and also serve as a basis for discussion helping to communicate and clarify your desires.

Questions to Think About

- How much time do you spend maintaining your garden or landscape each week?
- Do you currently have, or are you interested in retaining a landscape maintenance company?
- How interested are you in gardening?
- What is your experience and knowledge level?
- How much of the new design plan are you interested in completing yourself?
- What is the budget for new elements and features?
- What is the budget for new plant material?
- How soon do you want to implement all aspects of the design plan?

For additional information about designing a landscape please refer to the following fact sheets:

HLA-6440 Homeowner Garden Design Series: Planning the Landscape

HLA-6441 Homeowner Garden Design Series: Elements and Principles of Design

HLA-6500 What is Landscape Architecture?