HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

COMMON LANDSCAPE MISTAKES

We all make mistakes, and fortunately, most of the mistakes we make in the landscape can be fixed. Here are a few common landscaping blunders, and how to avoid them:

Mistake: Planting without planning

Instead of planning attractive landscapes that fit our lifestyles, sometimes we just go to the garden center and pick out pretty plants to fill in the empty spaces in our yards. This approach can be costly if the plants are not adapted to our yard conditions. So how do you find plants are right for your landscape site?

Remedy: Look at the landscape; make a plant list

Evaluate the sunlight, soil, and drainage conditions you have at your planting site. Be aware of planting constraints like underground utility lines and septic systems. Decide what size and shape of plants you need in each area. Then use the information you’ve compiled to form a plant list. Use the Plant Clinic services at the UF Osceola County Extension to help you, and other free resources such as the online plant selector at www.floridayards.org. You can learn the basics of designing a Florida-friendly landscape by attending one of the seminars listed at the end of this article.

Mistake: Color without design

Colorful plants can certainly help brighten a landscape, but simply adding color does not make a landscape look attractive and unified. Using too many colorful plants can prevent achieving a unified landscape, and create a mismatched look in your yard. I would go so far as to say that color is the most mistreated element of landscape design.

Remedy: Use color carefully

Using a rainbow of colorful plants throughout the landscape can be dazzling, but it can also be visually overwhelming in some compact landscapes. If having “the rainbow look” is appealing to you, try grouping colorful plants in only a few focal points of the landscape. You could also use one or two consistent plants throughout your yard to keep the landscape looking cohesive. For example, incorporate the same border grass or background shrub into all of your colorful areas.

If you want to create a more formal look, focus on only two or three colors throughout the landscape. For example, warm colors like reds, oranges, and yellows, or a classic color combination like blue and orange.

Mistake: Underestimating plant size

This might sound funny, but sometimes we forget that plants grow. “What you see is what you get” does not apply to plants. Trees and shrubs in the nursery are deceptively small compared to their mature size. Within a few short years, that cute little bunch of palms you just planted in your pool enclosure may grow to be ten foot tall, thorny monsters that threaten to tear through your screen and poke out your eyes. And it won’t be long before those scrawny shrubs planted around your air conditioner will need pruned nearly every week to keep them from blocking the air flow to your air conditioner.
Remedy: Pretend plants are full-grown when you plan and plant the landscape

First, you will need to know how large a plant will grow, and then give it room to grow. This will save you the headache and cost of later having to remove and replace plants that are not suitable for your yard. There are appropriate plants for every situation, so don’t settle for something that will cost you extra maintenance in the future.

Mistake: Too many tropical plants

We are on the borderline between two climatic zones in Central Florida, which means that we can grow plants from both zones. This also means that when we have a freeze event, some tropical plants will suffer cold damage or die. If your landscape has mostly tropical plants, you may be in danger of losing most of your landscape when a hard freeze comes our way.

Remedy: Use a variety of plants

Include Central Florida plants in your landscape that can tolerate cold temperatures. Some traditional tropical plants like avocado, citrus, banana, and palms also have specific cultivars (types) that are cold-tolerant. You may want to use cold-hardy plants that have a tropical look such as crape myrtles and clumping bamboo (I recommend using bamboos in containers, as they are easier to manage).

The good thing about mistakes is that we can learn from them. But if you want to prevent making landscape mistakes altogether, call 321-697-3000 or stop by Extension Services in Osceola Heritage Park to find solutions for your landscape.

Register for these free homeowner seminars at 407-518-2578:

Irrigation Maintenance for Homeowners
February 27th 6:30 – 8:30pm
Extension Services, Osceola Heritage Park

Basic Landscape Design
March 1st 9:00am - noon
Poinciana Community Center, 395 Marigold Ave.

Basic Landscape Design
March 29th 9:00am – noon
Extension Services, Osceola Heritage Park

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