



A Shrub for all Seasons...A Shrub for all Reasons

Penelope O'Sullivan (2007) offers advice in the Choosing, Planting and Maintenance of Shrubs in her book "The Homeowner's Complete Tree and Shrub Handbook"

Before buying and planting...

You need to determine the purpose of the shrub as the first step to guide the selection. Planning ahead will clarify your purchase goals and prevent costly errors. Recognition of your wishes, needs and physical attributes of your location should guide your selection. Plan ahead acknowledging the mature size and shape of the shrub allowing it to grow into the space rather than outgrowing its location. A new landscape may initially appear sparse especially with a staged plan. Temporary gaps can be filled with ferns, flowers or ornamental grasses that can be easily relocated in the future.

Principles of Design...

The basic principles of design work both for your room design as well as your garden.

Unity: As a basic element of landscape design, unity brings together the disparate parts to make it fit together to create the whole. Plant choices and construction materials must complement the overall plan and suit the site.

Repetition: Repetition of chosen plant materials, shapes, textures and colors, along with combinations throughout a garden will help to bring it together.

Sequence: Unify a garden by connecting one area to the other in an orderly and consistent fashion. Sequence will join objects through space.

Balance: Balance is reflected in what you see in your space. Where you are when you observe something impacts how you perceive the visual weight of the plants and objects around you. Two types of balance exist as formal and informal. Formal balance is symmetrical: one side mirroring the other. Symmetry appears manmade and reflects control. Asymmetrical balance is more elusive. It appears informal, curving and naturalistic. Asymmetry balances different plantings on either side of an imaginary vertical line, appearing equal but not identical.

Scale: Scale will assist with defining the relationship of objects within your landscape. Size of landscape elements relative to your house and neighboring elements should be complementary in nature.

Accents: Accents will add zest to your design and can be created in many ways. As examples, a change in the slope of the land will add variety to a design. Planting a tall spiky shrub will bring pause to a border dominated by low round plantings. Seasonal color can also be utilized to create accents.

Focal points: Focal points are stronger elements than accents, breaking up a visual sequence with drawing attention to a standout plant or object, allowing you to rest your gaze. A single focal point per view can be effective: multiple focal points may create overload and confusion.

The Big Four: Line, Form, Texture and Color

Line, form, texture and color are design elements that will assist in unifying your plan.

Line: Use of lines will direct the gaze forward along a path or create a stop at a focal point. Line assists with determining speed: quick with straight and slow with curved.

Form: Form will define the mass within an outline, with line determining the shape.

Texture: Texture will range from fine to coarse, giving personality to the garden. Texture may be affected by seasonal differences in a plant.

Color: Selection of color has an impact on the garden perspective. Cool colors (blue, blue-green and violet) recede and feel restful with warm colors (red, orange and yellow) creating a welcoming and exciting atmosphere.

Other Factors to Consider in Shrub Selection

Plant hardiness: Thunder Bay is Zone 3 – can push to Zone 4 for protected locations.

Height and Width: Crucial that your mature selection “fit” your desired location and scale.

Growth Rate: Growth rate determines speed at which plant will mature to fill space. Fast growing may require pruning with slow growing requiring less.

Seasonal Interest: This refers to fragrance and form as well as color and texture. Deciduous foliage of evergreen trees: bark texture and color: fragrant, edible and attractive fruits or flowers: all will enhance a woody ornamental at different times.

Garden Usage: Desired utilization will impact choices. To create a screen for an undesired element will require a dense selection from top to bottom. A mixture of evergreen and deciduous shrubs can be utilized to create a less imposing screen.

Light: Light exposure is a crucial element impacting plant growth and well being. Determine if your location is full sun, dappled or deep shade and make the appropriate selection.

Soil: Determine your soil type: moist, well drained, ph needs, drainage issues, fertility.

Time: Plant needs must match the time and skill of the gardener caring for them.

Pest and Disease Resistance: Tougher plants may require less maintenance and less likely needing replacement. More problematic selections may be seen as a challenge worth the investment by a seasoned gardener.

Personal Preference: This may be the most frequent crucial element impacting shrub selection: you need to like it!