

Herbaceous Materials in the Landscape - by E. Robert Gregan, ASLA

“The greatest design opportunities for inserting one’s personality into the landscape at the least expense lie with in this plant group...”

1. Environmental Awareness

a. Be familiar with the site

i. Growing conditions

1. Soil, sun, irrigation, etc.

ii. Existing vegetation

2. Classification

a. Annuals

i. Flowers, vines, vegetables, herbs

b. Biennials

c. Perennials

i. Bulbs, water plants

3. Use

a. Accent

b. Filler

c. Texture

d. Color

e. Reduced maintenance

f. Control erosion

g. Formal, informal

h. Blooming succession

4. Rather than an afterthought, herbaceous perennials should be considered in the early stages of design.

5. Plant Characteristics

- a. Annuals
 - i. Long season of blooms
 - ii. Lend themselves to geometric patterns
 - iii. Excellent in containers
- b. Perennials
 - i. Greater range of color, texture and form.
 - ii. Limited flowering period.
 - iii. Longevity.
 - iv. Informal

6. Plant Selection and Maintenance

- a. Herbaceous plants require some maintenance but less than some annuals and shrubs.
- b. Select low maintenance plants for public landscaping.
- c. Group plants together by their growth requirements.
- d. When selecting native plants, use those adapted best to the specific environment.
- e. Native, wildflower plantings still need some maintenance.

7. Wildflower Care

- a. Be specific to the geographical area.
- b. Rare wildflowers should be preserved unless necessary.
- c. Only buy rare, native plants from licensed nurseries, not from questionable collectors.

8. Plant Selection

- a. Consider all the visual qualities of these plants: line, form, texture, size, etc.
- b. Analyze and plan on the best growing conditions: soil, water, light, drainage, shade
- c. Plants should complement surroundings.

- d. Plants roles: separation, enclosure, frame, background, accents, shadows, patterns.
- e. Match plants with sun exposure: Woodland plants, shade. Meadow plants, sun.
- f. Use these plants to accent natural features: stones, water, etc.
- g. Plants in containers give flexibility, mobility.
 - i. Hanging containers adds a further dimension.
- h. Vines fill narrow spaces, give vertical accent and partition.

9. Plant Compositions

- a. Arrange in balanced groupings. Within the groupings, complimentary scale, color and texture.
- b. Use individual plants as specimens.
- c. To create depth: Fine textured plants in foreground, larger textured plants in back.
- d. Light-colored plants will illuminate dark surroundings.
- e. Taller plants form backdrops for lower plantings.
- f. Place fragrant plants where people can enjoy them.
- g. Use willow plants where they can be moved by the breeze.

10. Plant Forms

- a. Horizontal plants are restful.
- b. Vertical plants are severe.
- c. Oblique, slanted plants suggest movement.

11. Seasonality: Try to arrange plants blooming and foliage colors.

12. Color

- a. For a restful garden, green dominates.
 - i. Dark green leaves create a feeling of greater distance.
 - ii. Light green leaves draw the eye, even in shade.
- b. Cool colors are receding.

- c. Reserve warm colors for accents and to decrease depth.
- d. You can shade down bright colors with paler colors and gray and white.
- e. Design around foliage color because it persists longer than seasonal flowers.