

# The Trillium

Piedmont Chapter  
North American Rock Garden Society  
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC

## Designing Small Landscapes

by Pam Beck

**There are two major design challenges for smaller landscapes – the first and foremost is achieving privacy, and the second is creatively attaining a spacious feeling.**

When planning your small space: determine what use you will make of the landscape; consider the limitations and assets of the site; decide the theme or style of your home and garden; and realistically resolve how much time and money you are willing to put into this landscape. A well-planned garden (no matter the size) will always feel more harmonious with careful consideration to form and function.

Notice the orientation of your home in relation to the rising and setting of the sun throughout the seasons. This will dictate appropriate plants based on your landscape's light conditions. A sweltering southern exposure requires a very different plant palette than a constantly shady, thus much cooler north side of the house. An early morning exposure is perfect for azaleas and partial-shade ferns that would otherwise cook in broiling afternoon sunlight.



Photo by Pam Beck

This Japanese monastery garden shows perfect restraint for an intimate space.

## Welcoming Containers

(Continued on page 2)

by Lisa Bartlett

Where I come from, Atlanta, Georgia, Southern hospitality is legendary. It is not just a statement, it's a way of life down here. Our home is our soul, it's where we feel most 'grounded' and we want all who enter to feel just as comfortable as we do. It's the front door where that feeling of 'welcome y'all' begins. It's where we get our first impression of what the person who lives there might be like. So what does your front entrance say about you? Instead of 'welcome y'all', does it scream, 'y'all go away now, ya hear?'. If it's not exactly welcoming, you don't have to do a major renovation, a few well placed containers can make all the difference.



Photos by Lisa Bartlett

Container gardening has really caught on in recent years. I think it's because most people just don't have the time anymore to spend in a proper garden. People say they still love to garden, they just don't want to be there when it happens. Believe it or not, container gardening, when done properly, can save you time and money.

What kind of container should I use?

Having a hard time deciding what containers to use or even plants? Let your home's exterior decide it for you. If you have a cottage or bungalow style home you are lucky, you can use a broad range of plants and materials. A

Sample of pots selection available at your local home supply store.

(Continued on page 4)

Choose your screening plantings well. Some trees grow quickly, seeming ideal for hiding your neighbor's plastic, neon-colored swing set; but, if these same screening plants also grow wide, then you have lost a large chunk of your own backyard. Look for evergreens that are narrow or ones that can tolerate shearing.

Many properties fall away, so a sloping tract may seem impossible to partition. In this case, you can create an obstruction by placing a single large tree close to your viewing area rather than try to plant along the property line. This is the same principle as shielding your eyes with your hand during a frightening scene in a movie.

When a space is too small for large trees, vertical lines can be accomplished by erecting arbors, obelisks, pergolas, or other supports for vines. Drawing the eye upward in the landscape takes away from the confines of modest space.

Another advantage of placing an arbor covered with an evergreen vine along a driveway or over a deck is that it will also block your neighbor's view when you want to sit outside. Privacy goes both ways.

Try to tie all of the decorative elements of your garden together in order to extend the space. If you have brick walls, use brick walkways. If the house is white, paint your fence and deck railings white, too. If you have black iron arbors, use black iron plant hooks and seating with black painted pots and baskets. Group containerized plants by using one type of material such as terra cotta, so that uniformity will create harmony. Similarity is soothing in a small space.

Many good landscapes lose their sense of balance because of the size of the plants, accents, or furniture placed within them. Large trees or oversized pots will dominate a diminutive garden. One dramatic statue becomes a focal point, but many become a crowd. Less is more, especially in a tight confine.

Search for scaled-down cultivars of the plants you love. Dwarf trees, miniature conifers, petite bulbs, and Lilliputian groundcovers can fill a limited space with delightfully contrasting texture and color. The only thing to remember when admiring an undersized plant with an innocent-sounding scientific name ending in 'Nana' is that depending on the plant, the smallest selection could still be gigantic.

Use plants that perform double-duty. A single *Daphne* can perfume an entire landscape in late winter and it is an attractive evergreen shrub. Discover the delight of fragrant night-blooming plants if you are away at work all day. Woody herbs make aromatic small shrubs and groundcovers. A hedge of blueberries gives seasonal interest with late winter flowers, delicious summertime fruits, and adds brilliant fall color. Small fruiting trees, strawberry groundcovers, and trellis draped with raspberries or grapes enable you to have your landscape, and eat it, too.

You may want a water feature. A simple recycling fountain can add the perfect amount of white noise needed to drown out the drone of neighborhood sounds, with constant trickling or splashing. A bowl of goldfish residing in a shady nook, a tub filled with hardy water lilies, or a narrow stream bubbling along a garden path are miniature water projects that will embellish your small landscape.



A perfectly sited small water feature adds so much to the overall landscape design.



Harmonious color unifies this Raleigh landscape.

Photo by Pam Beck

Photo by Pam Beck

Utilize every square inch. Garden all the way to the front curb. If the only sunny spot for your bush tomatoes is at the mailbox, plant them there surrounded by purple basil, and then run a cucumber up the post for salads. Train decorative vines up the house or espalier small trees against the foundation. Fill your patio with containers. Hang baskets from the eaves. Window boxes and deck railing planters give you even more room to grow.

If your lot is long and narrow, try staggering your vertical lines from trees, structures, and statuary to create mystery, implying there are more hidden delights just beyond. Your goal should be to screen parts



Photo by Pam Beck

Use all available surfaces for plants in a small space.

of the landscape so that a visitor cannot see the entire garden upon first arrival. Curved walkways, projecting screens of evergreens, and sections of fencing increase the adventure of discovery of what may await ahead.

Depending on your neighborhood covenants, you may or may not be able to fence off your property. If you can fence, choose a style that will compliment the house and still achieve what you need. Tall, solid security fencing is effective, but may be seen as an unfriendly act by your neighbors, whereas an open picket could still contain your dog. As the old adage goes, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

Do your neighbors have a spectacular specimen tree, water feature, or garden view that you would enjoy seeing every day? The principle of “borrowed view” may create the illusion of enlarging your property by extending the line-of-sight into the landscape beyond. In this situation, you would not want to totally screen off your property. A break in the hedge or a window in the fence may be exactly what you need.

A few tricks of perspective can allow the garden to appear larger than it really is. Build your walkways wider as you enter the garden, but slightly narrow the path toward the end to create the illusion of depth. Use broad-leaved plants close to the entrance, then scale down foliage size through the landscape until your tiniest leaves are at the back of the property.

Placing the landscape on the diagonal adds interest. Varied levels with a series of stairs in the landscape can create the feeling of greater distance traveled. Build a folly at the end of a path that looks like a doorway into another garden when it is really a mirror reflecting the landscape you are currently enjoying.

For depth, use colors that recede, like blues and purples, not only in your choice of flowers, but also on your painted hardscaping and seating. To make an unsightly item disappear, paint it flat black, dark brown if in a mulched bed, or deep forest green if around evergreen plantings. On the other hand, if you want to brighten a darker corner of the garden, a light wash of color, or white paint, will definitely draw attention to that area.

The advantage of gardening in a small space is that you will probably spend less money than landscaping a large property, but the challenges are greater. Each corner of the property will be closely examined. Your plants must be carefully chosen. You will have to be a firm editor. Attention to detail is critical. Keep it simple.

Placing the landscape on the diagonal adds interest. Varied levels with a series of stairs in the landscape can create the feeling of greater distance traveled.



Photo by Pam Beck

The focal point in Faye Beck’s Tennessee garden is enhanced by the surrounding plants and furniture.

**The City Gardener’s Handbook, The Definitive Guide to Small-Space Gardening**, by Linda Yang, 2002, Storey Books, ISBN 1-58017-449-3

**Creating Privacy in the Garden**, by Julia Fogg, 1999, Sterling Publishing Company, ISBN 1-84188-009-X

**Planning a Small Garden, Big Inspirations for Compact Plots**, by Richard Bird, 1998, SOMA Books, ISBN 1-57959-035-7

**Planting Trees and Shrubs for Small Spaces**, by David Papworth and Noel Prockter, 1997, SMITHMARK Publishers, ISBN 0-7651-9739-1

**101 Essential Tips Planning a Small Yard**, Contributing Editor John Brookes, 1996, A DK Publishing Book, ISBN 07894-0564-4

**The Small Garden Book**, by Peter McHoy, 1995, SMITHMARK Publishers, ISBN 0-8317-7995-0  
**Small Garden Design**, by Paul Collins, 1989, Quintet Publishing Ltd. ISBN 1-55521-466-5



(Continued from page 1)

home with more traditional lines would be better suited to something classical, like matching urns or terra cotta. What if you have a modern home? How about using metal containers with bold architectural plants like Agaves or Yucca?

Wood is a great option and can be painted to match the exterior color of your home. Terra cotta can be pricey, but ages beautifully and looks classic. If it's not quality terra cotta, it will crack and won't last through the winter. The new generation of plastic, resin, and Styrofoam are an excellent choice, they are light weight, never crack when frozen and look great.

Where should I place my containers?

The container should enhance and define the front entrance. The biggest mistake homeowners make is using a container that is too small.. Small containers are harder to maintain and to keep watered, also when grouped together they can look 'busy'.

Large containers grouped with smaller ones are a much better combination.

Arranging your containers can be tricky. That's why most choose to use two matching containers with matching plant material. A cliched choice, but there's nothing wrong with playing it safe. How about kicking it up a notch and add a little drama with one large container on one side of the door and 3 smaller containers on the other? In landscape design, a good rule of thumb is to plant in 3's, 5's and 7's. Odd numbers are more pleasing to the eye. This same rule applies when grouping containers.

**Tip:** Arrange the containers themselves unplanted, they will be much easier to move.

Also, leave the plants in the original pots and play with the design before you plant them.



Photos by Lisa Bartlett

A collection of container plantings that complement the entry.

What soil should I use?

In general, once you've decided on the container, you will need to purchase a premium quality container mix. They are more expensive, but they contain water retaining polymers, they drain more quickly and they contain slow release fertilizer. This makes taking care of your container so much easier. While most plants are suited for containers, not all soils are suited for container plants. Down here in the South our winters are pretty mild, however with our heavy clay soils it's the wet that kills most plants.

For my succulent collection: I have my own soil "recipe" and good drainage is the main ingredient.

1/3 expanded slate (if you can't find it, perlite is an excellent substitute)

1/3 premium potting mix

1/3 coarse sand

and a pinch of worm castings. I like to finish the container off with a top dressing of pretty pebbles.

For my tropicals: I like to use a richer "recipe".

1/3 premium potting mix

1/3 compost

1/3 composted pine bark (if you can't find it, leave a few bags of mini nuggets laying around in their bags for a couple of months)

For my conifer collection: I like to use a "recipe" that will stick to their ribs a little more.

1/5 premium potting mix

1/5 Hen manure

1/5 compost

1/5 decomposed granite or coarse sand

1/5 composted pine bark To that, I like to add a pinch of lime for good measure. I also like a little lime in my margaritas. Too much information perhaps?

**Tip:** Never use top soil or soil from the garden. It will compact, eventually suffocating your plant.

### What kind of plants should I use?

First and foremost, how much sun does your front entrance get? If it gets 6 or more hours of direct sun, you would be better off choosing plants that can take full sun. If your containers will be getting less than 6 hours of sunlight, or they will be under a porch, chances are you will have to go with a more shade tolerant plant. Your plant choice should also depend on how much time are you willing to spend on maintaining them. The classic low maintenance plants are evergreens which include Hollies, Boxwoods, Arborvitae, Junipers, and Ivies. But Camellias, Japanese Maples, fragrant Osmanthus or other small trees and shrubs could be used just as effectively.

If you plan on using seasonal color or perennials, they will require a little more work. Dead heading is key to keep them blooming. Do your homework when choosing plant material. Know their requirements. How much sun? How much water? How big will they eventually get?

### What plant color should I use?

People choose evergreens for a reason, they are low maintenance and green all year. Green goes with everything. But what if you want seasonal color? Rule of thumb, choose dark colored blooms with a light colored homes and dark colored blooms with a light colored homes. Other than that, choose your favorite color and go from there.

### Plant Parenthood: Care and

### Maintenance

Containers, when it's hot and dry, should be checked everyday. If they need water, do so until you see water coming out of the bottom of the container. The frequent watering required to keep your container plants healthy also flushes out any nutrients you have in the soil, adding a good slow release fertilizer is a good idea. You could fertilize more frequently with a diluted water-soluble product. Any slow release pellets you have used should be changed out with each seasons new plantings.



Photos by Lisa Bartlett

A group of pots creates a focal point

**Tip: Group plants with the same light, water and food needs. You wouldn't plant a cactus with a fern, unless it's a Xeric fern which would be quite at home with the cactus.**

Keep an eye out for pests. I find just a good shot with a hose gets rid of most pests, though you may have to shoot them more often.

Prune your container. I love to see exuberant containers but not unruly ones. If a plant is outgrowing the others, do not hesitate to pinch that sucker back.

### Adding Instant Charm for Little Cash

This traditional Southern home's front entrance doesn't exactly scream, 'Y'all come on in, it's sooooo geewwwd to see yeewww'. The long stairs lead to a rather uninviting front door, with nothing to draw your interest. With a few, well placed containers, this home goes from a depressing Tennessee Williams facade to a feeling good 'Driving Miss Daisy!' Though nothing is symmetrical, I've used touches of blue as the unifying theme. The front entrance is completely transformed. Who wouldn't want to knock on this door to see who's home?

See how just a few well placed containers can change a whole attitude? Now that you saved all that money you would have used on the renovation, why not take a trip some where? Just be sure you get someone to water while you are away or it won't be very 'welcoming' when you return. ❧

Lisa Bartlett was Host of her own call in, organic gardening radio show, "Green and Grow" and Co-Host on Joe Lamp'l's, "The Joe Gardener Radio Show", she is also a container garden designer, writer and speaker who has been avid gardener and plant nut her whole life. Owner of Green and Grow and Containers to Go

678 296 7183    lisab@greenandgrow.com



## Remembering Edith Boyer

Edith Boyer, a founding member of the Piedmont Chapter died Saturday February 20 at Carolina Meadows, Chapel Hill. She was born Feb 27, 1913 in New Jersey, worked in New York, then married and reared her sons in Conecticut. She and her husband moved to Chapel Hill in 1971 where she created one of the finest private gardens in the area. An active volunteer at the North Carolina Botanical Garden, she was instrumental in designing and installing the herb garden there.

In September, 1985, Nancy Goodwin, Sandy Ladendorf and Edith advertised in the local newspapers to attract interested gardeners. Through the years, the Chapter has grown from its early years of 10-12 members to its current size. We appreciate the efforts of all three founders and though Edith has not been active for the past few years, we will miss her.

Notes from Pam Beck's 3/21/09 Lecture:



**Beth Jimenez and Amelia Lane  
Invite everyone to their:  
3rd Open Garden and Art Sale  
Saturday, April 18, 2009  
10am-4 pm  
4904 Hermitage Dr.  
Raleigh, NC 27612**

**Artists showing pottery, jewelry, metal work, stained glass, ceramic birdhouses, concrete garden sculptures, and hypertufa.**

**Come renew your spirit in the garden!**

## **Upcoming Meetings**

**April 18, 2009**

**Lisa Bartlett, Atlanta, Ga.**

**“Container Gardening:  
Tricks of the Trade”**

**May 24, 2009**


### **Spring Picnic**

**Morning Tour of Montrose, Hillsborough**

**Lunch on the Grounds**

**at Dee Hamilton’s Home**

**Followed by Optional Tours**



**Piedmont Chapter Meeting**  
Totten Center, Chapel Hill, NC

**March 21, 2009**  
**9:30 a.m.**

**Pam Beck**  
Wake Forest, NC

**“Small Space  
Garden Design”**

*The Trillium*, Newsletter of the Piedmont Chapter  
The North American Rock Garden Society  
1422 Lake Pine Drive, Cary, NC 27511

Place  
Stamp  
Here

**First Class Mail**

Mail label

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

David White, Chair

Bobby Ward, Past Chair

Bobby Wilder, Treasurer

**BOARD MEMBERS AT**

**LARGE:** Kirt Cox

Dave Duch

Tom Harville

Todd Lasseigne

Marlyn Miller

Patricia Scolnik

**TRILLIUM EDITORS:**

Dave Duch and Marian Stephenson

**OTHER SIGNIFICANT POSITIONS:**

Sept. Plant Sale Manager: Kirtley Cox

Refreshments: Gwen and Maurice Farrier



**Attention Members!**

To preserve the green in our world, Pam Beck has decided not to make copies of hand-outs to accompany her lecture in March. If you anticipate wanting to make notes, as many of us do, please remember to bring a note pad to the meeting or use the space provided within this issue ... Thanks. The Editors



**Refreshments at the Meetings**

You are encouraged to bring goodies to share to the meetings.  
Beverages are available. Last name begins with:  
March U—Z  
April For all who couldn't participate before.  
But feel free to bring goodies anytime!