



New to You Landscaping: Before you call the professionals

Mollie Stock, Frederick County Master Gardener

**UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND**
EXTENSION
Solutions in your community

Congratulations, you or you and the bank have bought a new home. Old or new, the house is new to you. Here are some ideas to think about, questions to ask and things to do before calling a landscape architect, designer or contractor.

Live with your yard for a time. Think about where you need summer shade. Observe the sun's track across your yard. Thinking yummy vegetables? Remember a vegetable garden needs full sun. Observe the front of your house. Imagine how it would look without the existing plants. Whatever has been or is to be planted should compliment your house. Are plants over grown? Remember some plants grow slowly and some fast. Pruning should be done to respect the growth habit and shape of the plant. Some plants prefer sun; others do better with some shade.

To do it right a soil test is the number one imperative. Many plants – yews for instance, will not tolerate poorly drained soil. Plants such as azaleas, Rhododendrons, and mountain laurel prefer a more acid soil where as lilacs prefer an alkaline soil. In addition lawns should have a PH range between six and seven. When establishing a new lawn Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium (NPK) at a 1:2:1 ratio should be applied.

Have you found a place for a compost bin? A four by four area is large enough. Why have leaves, grass clippings, and branches hauled away when they will decay into leaf mold to improve your soil.

Your choice of plants may depend on a number of factors. Do you wish to attract birds or butterflies to your garden? Are there colors your prefer? Is gardening a hobby or a chore? Is age catching up with you, requiring a low maintenance yard? You may wish to consider a rain barrel to catch water from your roof so you will be prepared for summer droughts and water restrictions. If you are in a neighborhood with covenants, they may not be as restrictive as you think. An appeal can be made.

Some plants prefer a drier location, others like a more moist area. Consider including native plants, those that grow in our woods and fields rather than imports from other regions. Natives are acclimated to the hardiness zone where you live.

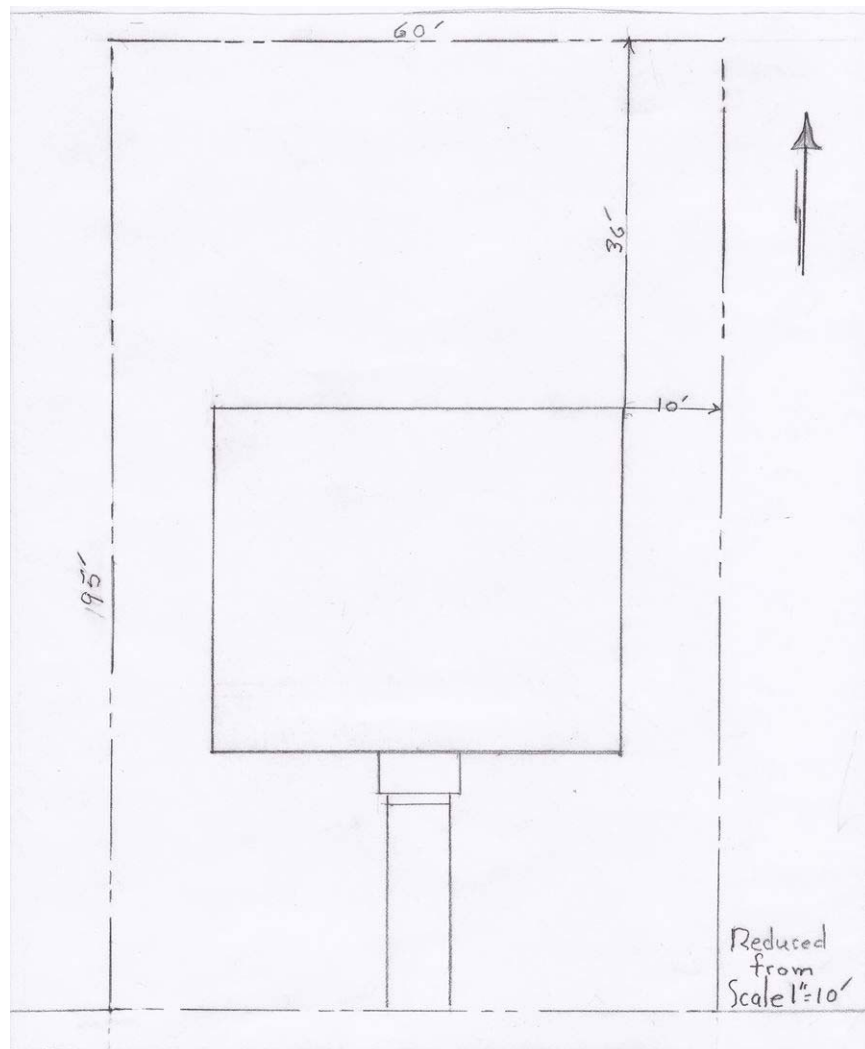
Plants mistaken for dead may not be. For example crape myrtle leafs out late in the season. Depending on the time of year you moved into your house there might be perennials and bulbs hidden in the ground. Most perennials die back to the ground each year, and then come up again in the spring. Both spring and fall blooming bulbs die back then come up to bloom again. Waiting allows you to see flower and foliage color giving you a chance to label colors and identify plants more readily. Some misplaced or overgrown plants can be easily transplanted, azaleas for instance.

**EQUAL ACCESS PROGRAMS
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER**

Before calling in a professional or doing it yourself, create a design template to work with:

1. Enlarge your house location plat to a scale of 1" = 10'. Include the north point.
2. Locate your house doors, windows, and downspouts. Note windowsill heights.
3. Locate porch, walks, driveway and large trees.
4. Locate existing fence.
5. If there is a slope or hill, note the top and base of it.

Put these measurements on your plan. Buy some bum wad or onionskin, both are less expensive than drafting paper. Lay the bum wad over your plat and try out some ideas. Draw in a terrace, patio, deck, walkways, vegetable garden, swing set, shade trees, and other plantings. Once you have coordinated ideas with housemates, including a discussion of your budget, then you might consider calling in the experts.



For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, call the Frederick County Office of the University of Maryland Extension, (301) 600-1596, or visit <http://www.frederick.umd.edu/>. Our mission is to educate Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.