

Spring 2011



From the Ground Up

An optimist is the human personification of spring.

Susan J. Bissonette

Design Tips: *Front Yard Gardens*

-  Choose plants according to your garden's orientation. If you have a large mature tree you have to manage not only the shade but competition from the roots for available moisture and nutrients. Epimediums and geraniums are two perennials that tolerate dry shade as will various hostas, though hostas require regular watering to become established
-  Less is often more. Do not have one of everything. Repeating plant shapes, colours and textures and using groupings of a few species guarantees a cohesive look.
-  Favour foliage over flowers. Pick plants according to how attractive they are even when they are not blooming. Flowers should often be viewed as a bonus. Peonies, hosta, and many other perennials hold their place with lush foliage all season.
-  Scale is important. The backdrop of the front garden is the house so make the two relate in stature. This means you should incorporate trees and shrubs of various mature heights.
-  Don't ignore existing landscape features especially mature trees and shrubs. A careful pruning job may return these plants to their former glory
-  Add structure either living or non-living. Individual plants such as an upright juniper or a mass of the same plant (think hedge) can create structure as can a feature such as an arbour, fountain, sculpture or birdbath.
-  Soil needs nourishment to sustain a verdant garden. Adding compost creates a healthy soil that is easy to work, retains moisture and provides nutrients to the plants.
-  Plan for discreet paths that allow you to get up close and personal with your plants. You will need to do many things: deadhead and trim, pick off or spray bugs, stop and smell the roses, so your garden needs to be easy to access.
-  Complement the style of your house. An English country garden will not feel right in front of a modern style home.
-  Consider keeping some lawn or using a large expanse of hardy green groundcover (thyme, sedum, lysimachia) The contrast between green and colour and texture makes for a very attractive garden.
-  Be realistic about your time and energy. A yard full of flowering plants and shrubs will take more time (perhaps less water) than a lawn. It will be more satisfying if the yard is simple and manageable than if it is full of potentially beautiful plants that you can't maintain properly.

Growing Grapes

You don't have to live in Italy or California to successfully grow grapes. There are several excellent varieties to grow here on the Canadian prairies. Grown for both their landscape qualities as a climbing vine and their fruit, grapes require a long, hot summer to produce and ripen. They must be planted in a sunny, sheltered location, preferably with a southern exposure. Grapes are easily pruned to control size of the plant and to promote larger grapes and earlier ripening. Vines growing up a trellis, with large clusters of fruit, are a beautiful addition to any backyard or greenhouse.

Varieties to grow here:

Vitis 'Valiant'

Small greenish – white flowers are followed by purple blue grapes in medium sized clusters. They are good for fresh eating, jelly or jam and fabulous for juicing. Valiant ripens in early to mid September, slightly earlier than other varieties. Vines grow from 8 to 20' long and they are self pollinating.

Vitis 'Beta'

A well-known northern variety, this grape, popular for its blue-black fruit, is commonly used for juice and jellies. Beta is a hybrid of the Riverbank grape and Concord. It is an excellent choice for a climbing plant where privacy is desired. The fruit ripens in early October.

Vitis 'Minnesota'

With reddish purple fruit larger than Beta and the sweetest purple grape, Minnesota is a popular grape to grow on the prairies. Vines will grow to 15' long. Minnesota ripens late September to early October. It needs a pollinator.

In the second or third year of growth, clusters of grapes will be produced. Mature size and color will be achieved before the grapes reach full sweetness so taste test before picking. Place your hand under the cluster of fruit and use shears to clip it from the vine. For wine-making or fresh eating, pick the grapes at their sweetest. For jams and jellies, pick earlier as the pectin content is greatest before full maturity is reached.

For more information on planting, pruning, protection and propagation as well as harvesting grapes, please visit the info sheets on our website and click on grapes.



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Spotlight On

Our “Spotlight On” page provides information on a different tree, shrub and perennial in each addition of “From the Ground Up”



Rodgersia
Rodgersia pinnata

These plants prefer moist, dappled shade but will bloom in full sun if kept consistently moist. Bold, exotic-looking leaves with airy plumes of light pink to ivory flowers appear in early to midsummer. They will grow to a height of 35-47” and spread about 35-40.” They should be placed in a more winter protected spot, using extra mulching around the crowns over the winter. They are hardy to zone

Trost’s Dwarf Birch
Betula pendula ‘Trost’s Dwarf’

This multi-stemmed deciduous shrub has an unusual weeping growth habit and a delicate texture. Its deeply cut ferny leaves are dark green turning yellow in the fall. It prefers full sun to part shade and average moisture conditions, though it should not be allowed to dry out. It has a slow growth rate and will mature to a height and spread of 5.’ It is hardy to Zone 2.



Amur Maackia
Maackia amurensis

This attractive small tree has showy upright white flower spikes in mid-summer, attractive green foliage which emerges silver in the spring and smooth golden bark. It prefers to grow in full sunlight and is adaptable to dry or moist conditions. Its mature height is 25’ tall and will eventually spread to 30’. It is hardy to zone 3



Spring Pruning Tips

Early spring is the best time to remove damaged or diseased branches, and to rejuvenate old shrubs to promote flowering, improve their shape or improve safety.

Shrubs such as yellow and red twigged dogwoods which are grown for their brightly coloured bark should be cut back hard every two or three years since their new growth has the brightest color. Consider reducing their height by half and thin out the remaining stems by one third.

Some species grow slowly and only need to be pruned occasionally. If they are overgrown, now is the best time to shape them.

Shrubs that bloom later in summer or fall normally flower on the new seasons growth and should be pruned in spring to promote vigorous growth thus encouraging abundant flowering. It is easier to see which stems need to be removed before the leaves block your view. This would include hydrangea, potentillas, pink blooming spireas and most shrub roses.

Shrubs that bloom in spring and early summer should be pruned shortly after they flower. This would include lilac, forsythia, white flowering spireas and any of the ornamental cherry or plum shrubs.

Now is the time to prune ornamental flowering trees, ash, oak and linden for shape.

Do not prune maple, birch or willow in the spring – They bleed. Wait until they have fully leafed out when the foliage will utilize the plant juices, reducing the “bleeding” and promoting more rapid healing

Remember that elm trees have a restricted pruning schedule due to Dutch Elm Disease .

**Do not prune elm trees between
April 1 and August 31**

For more information on pruning stop by
Unique Garden Centre

Help Stop Mosquitos!



Homeowners can reduce mosquito breeding areas by checking their property and eliminating areas which could lead to standing water or places where small puddles or pools of water tend to collect and make perfect mosquito breeding areas: Swimming pool covers, tarps or other covers; leaves in rain gutters and spouts, outdoor flowerpots and containers used for gardening and yard work, and old tires. Be sure to clean out your gutters from last fall's leaves, put old tires in the garage or shed, and empty outdoor flowerpot containers after a rain to eliminate any standing water. Regularly clean out bird baths. Cover rain barrels with a tight-fitting screen. Add gold fish to your pond.

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