



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension



# Distance Learning courses

## **Introduction to Garden Design**

### **Course Overview**

This 6-week online course (7.5, including the introductory week and Spring Break week) provides an opportunity for you to design your own garden. You will be studying and experimenting with the basic design procedures, learning about proper plant selection, and you will write and reflect on the process as you learn. The instructor will take an active role in this creative endeavor by providing feedback on your assignments and journal entries. You will also have the opportunity to learn from one another through an open forum in which you can share your ideas with others.

The purpose of this course is to understand the steps necessary to create an ecologically sound and attractive garden, and to engage in self-expression through this process.

### **Course Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand garden site analysis and apply the concepts to your personal space.
- Gain some proficiency in basic garden design principles.
- Articulate a personal aesthetic -- what appeals to you, and what you enjoy.
- Lay out a rough site plan overview of your garden design.

### **Course Philosophy**

This course is designed to encourage your discovery of basic garden design techniques. It is a garden design course for the beginner.

### **Our Approach**

We teach an approach to gardening that is based on the principle of right plant, right place. In other words, we will consider the needs of the plant in addition to the needs of the gardener.

### **Expectations**

With this in mind, we ask that you begin without demanding expectations of your abilities for each lesson or upon completion of the course. Keep an open mind, and please remember that it can take years to develop the kind of skill that you see in the magazines and texts!

Learning to design is like learning to play the piano: you would never expect yourself to be playing symphonies at the end of your first lesson, and yet often, it seems that people have this expectation with artistic techniques. Please take the time to enjoy yourself and get lost in the process, particularly since it offers the additional benefits of providing an experience that gives you a break from the rush and stress of daily life.

The text we have chosen will provide you with a reference for the terms and techniques introduced, while providing you with supplemental information that will help you to sharpen your skills on your own.

### **Working With the Real Thing**

Taking note of gardens, or even plant groupings, that are especially attractive to you will aid you in designing your own garden. Create a library of photos and drawings that you can use to help you develop your own style.

### **Reflective Writing**

Your reflective writing will allow you to develop a thoughtful perspective and a dialogue with the course instructor. Reflection is something that you can do at home, at work, or during a stroll through the garden. It is a very important part of developing the creative and observational components of your brain, something we expect to improve not just your design ability, but your full range of activities around creativity and the plant world. It will encourage you to make connections between the course and your life experience, in addition to reflecting on course content.

### **Our Philosophy as Instructors**

This is an on-line course that you are likely taking for your own personal enrichment and proficiency. As such, I hope that you are intrinsically motivated to complete readings and all assignments, including optional assignments, to devote considerable time to designing, and to communicate with your colleagues freely and often in an effort to get the most from this course. I will assign readings, and I will assume you read them; I will not "test" you on content because I do not believe that should be your motivation. You will get from the course what you put into it.

Our communication will be positive and will focus on course content. Rude or offensive language, and overly critical commentary will not be tolerated. It is a course taken for enrichment, and the way we communicate with one another will be constructive. Please be open with your feedback and feel free to contact us with any questions. Open dialogue is encouraged.

### **Course Schedule & Format**

*March 12 – March 18*

Introduction Days: Welcome & Introductions

*March 19-25*

Week 1: Site Assessment *Part 1*

*March 26- April 1*

Week 2: Site Assessment Part 2 / Basic Design Principles: Personal Style, Garden Unity, and Maintenance

*April 2-8*

Week 3: Basic Design Principles: Scale & Proportion, Balance & Symmetry, Repetition, Movement

*April 9-15*

Spring Break

*April 16-22*

Week 4: Basic Design Principles: *Color, Form & Texture*

*April 23-29*

Week 5: Designing Your Garden: *Choosing & Buying Plants*

*April 30-May 6*

Week 6: Designing Your Garden: *Final Project and Buying Plants*

The class will open on March 12, although students who enroll are encouraged to access it early to become familiar with the contents. It will close on May 6; you will not be able to access the material after May 21. Each week, there will be lessons and corresponding assignments, which will be submitted to the course instructor before the stated deadline. You will find deadlines at the top right corner of each assignment.

You will need to dedicate a minimum of 15 hours per week to the lessons and assignments in this course. Each step builds upon the next; so keeping up with the exercises and journals will ensure your successful completion of a garden design plan. You'll also find supplementary assignments and additional resources to view for some of the lessons at the bottom of the topics menu.

It is important to mention that some students have found the site assessment exercises at the beginning of the course especially time consuming as they take place outdoors and require some planning to complete. Students who have got started on these exercises right away have had the best experiences completing the exercises in a

successful and timely manner. Be aware that this workload does not reflect the entire 6 weeks, and that once you have completed the required number of site assessment exercises after the first 2-3 weeks; most of the work can be accomplished inside and does not require planning around weather and outdoor accessibility.

Typically, designers must get the planning and assessment 'work' out of the way so they can get to the 'fun' of designing and picking proper plants. Our hope is that we have created a course where every step of the design process is 'fun', however the initial weeks to some, offer the impression that they are 'chores'. Our advice is to have fun outside, get friends and family involved, and take the time to learn about your site. These exercises are designed to be completed in an afternoon, but the garden is a living thing and the skills gained should be open to the many changes your garden will go through as it develops.

That being said it is important to focus on a specific site you are planning on creating a design for early on, one that you foresee yourself working with and building on for the entirety of the course. If the site you have in mind is especially large it may be in your best interest to focus on a smaller area of it, at first and save the larger area for expanding on as you build your design skills throughout the course.

In addition to planning your garden, you will also keep a reflective journal with entries that provide an opportunity to critically reflect on the lessons as well as the impact of the plants and gardening in your life. There will be suggested topics for the journal entry each week, but you are free to explore your own topics as long as they relate to gardening, plants, and nature. Journal entries will be submitted weekly to the course instructor using Moodle. You can use these to build a relationship with the instructor, and to better understand yourself, too.

Lastly, your final project will be your completed garden plan which will reflect your evolving experience and information you've learned throughout the course. The specific design, style, as well as the mode of executing the final plan will be a matter of your choice and preference.

## **Required Reading**

We will be using *Taylor's Master Guide to Landscaping* by Rita Buchanan (Houghton-Mifflin Co. New York, NY) for our main text. There will be chapters assigned with lessons as we move through the course.

This book should be very easy to find, most local libraries have it and if not it should be available for around \$25 from a local bookstore or on Amazon.com. If you end up mail-ordering it (used prices can be extremely inexpensive for this title) and would like to start the first week's reading before it arrives, the first chapter is available to read online from [Google Books](#).

We will also be using the *Site Assessment* by Charles P. Mazza. This booklet can be purchased for about \$20 online from [PALS Cooperative Extension](#).

**Required Materials** (All of these items should be available at your local art store)

**Trace Paper**

Do not pay a lot of money for trace paper (i.e. Vellum which runs \$20 a pad of 20 sheets). You should be able to purchase a roll for a few dollars. You wont need it to be more than 8 1/2 inches on one end unless you plan on doing very large drawings.

**Drawing Paper.** I recommend using sketch paper. Paper size depends on the size of your garden area. You will be using a scale of 1" = 4', so an 11" x 14" paper will accommodate a garden of approximately 44' x 56'.

**Grid Lined Paper (letter or legal size)**

This will really help you in drawing your site plans, so I encourage you to get a pad, available at art stores for a couple dollars.

**Notebook**

We would like you to keep a designated garden notebook as a place to store all your ideas, plant lists, budget items, prices, observations...whatever it is that you think about when designing your garden.

**Circle Template**

This will be crucial when you when you draw plants on your plan. Get one with good variety of sizes, you probably won't need one with extremely large circles. You could use a drawing compass for very large circles, you may want to pick up a cheap one of those if you don't have one.

**A Basic Set of Colored Pencils or Markers**

Whatever brand or type you prefer, high quality such as Prismacolors have their merits but for our purposes Crayola or anything you have around the house will be just fine.

**Black Sharpie**

One thin and one thick will usually cover all your needs.