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Consider Curb Appeal When Choosing Plants

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

First impressions count the most! Take a look at your front landscape. Studies show that three items that count most when looking at a house are the drive-up view, the walk up to the house, and the entry area.

For curb appeal, make sure your landscape matches the style of your home. A Mediterranean home should have plantings that look Mediterranean, like olive trees, lavender, and rosemary. Victorian homes look best framed with soft, pale flowers and old-fashioned plantings. To achieve an inviting landscape requires order, unity, and rhythm. Creating order includes using balance and even distribution of weight and color. Similar sized plants should be planted on each side of the property. For a more formal look, increase the symmetry of the landscape. An asymmetrical design creates a more casual, natural feeling.

Many lovely homes actually have landscapes that detract from their beauty rather than add to it. Stand out in the middle of or across the street and look at the whole picture. Frame your home with trees as if it were a fine painting. The trees should be the proper scale to set off your house, rather than dwarf it or make it loom too large. Make sure you plan for the ultimate size of your trees. Save yourself future headaches by not planting trees too close to your house or each other. You can transition from a horizontal front lawn to a vertical two-story home by gradually increasing the heights of plants in a border bed that frames the house between the lawn and the home.

Rhythm is achieved through the use of repetition and is not limited to plants. For example, using the same type of stepping stone or hardscape throughout creates rhythm. A repeated grouping of plants placed throughout the landscape creates rhythm.

Unity is achieved through color, size, texture and shape and is supported by interconnection. Plant borders and walkways are a common way of interconnecting and visually tying elements together. Think about the color of your home and what colors would complement it. Plan a color scheme and stick with it. Choose a few complimentary colors rather than the whole rainbow and group your colors together for the most impact. One flat of a single color annual could provide an enormous bang for the buck, especially if placed around the entryway.

A white house could use almost any color scheme, except white! A gray, blue, or pink house would probably look best with cool colors like pinks, blues and purples. A yellow house, on the other hand, would best be set off by hot colors, like red, orange, and yellow.

To brighten and warm up a shady area, add plants with cream and yellow variegated leaves. To cool down a hot spot, consider plants with different shades of blue, green, and grey foliage. Texture relates to leaf size and shape, e.g. the fine wispy texture of grasses compared to the giant leaf shape of a fan palm. In any area scatter plants of differing textures or group textures together, either way they will add a visual appeal.

Next consider the walk up to your house. It's important to be able to clearly see the path and the front door, so it's obvious where to go. It should be wide enough for two people to walk abreast comfortably. It will have more appeal if it has gentle curves around interesting focal points, like specimen plants, a water feature, or a birdbath.

The entry area should also be inviting. It's probably not the place to store your old hoses or piles of shoes. Try to dress it up with a few pots of color and maybe an attractive bench or swing to make it appear inviting. A nice fragrance is also a big plus for the entry area. Try osmanthus, jasmine, rosemary, or alyssum to add to the positive first impression of your home.

Once you have the basics covered, consider screening so you don't have to look at that old car in your neighbor's yard! Decide how tall you need the plants to be to achieve the desired effect. A screening plant doesn't have to be a solid mass. Even a fairly open planting can deceive the eye into looking at it rather than the view beyond.

So go out and take a fresh look at your front landscape. Does it offer the curb appeal that invites others to want to live there?

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