

Landscape design is a scientific art

Landscape planning is a fundamental component of permaculture. A detailed and comprehensive landscape plan saves money, time energy, and water. Meanwhile it boosts property values, enhances one's quality of **life** and produces bonus bounties.

A thorough landscape plan in the arid Southwest will include a landscape design, a water budget, a financial budget, and an installation schedule. Last month we delved into water budgeting. This month, we'll explore the scientific art of landscape design.

Landscape design is the illustrated component of the plan. It shows the size and location of the project's intended features. At minimum, an effective design accurately shows existing structures, utility lines, plant material, pathways, and patios. More complicated designs locate compost piles, play areas, shade structures, tool sheds and more. A successful design also applies these strategies:

- **Investigate nature.** As a good detective observes evidence with an alert and

unbiased eye, the landscape designer must first accumulate information unadulterated by thoughts of "Why" or "What can I do about that?" She must be pure receptor - using all of her senses. Where is it hot, cold, wet, dry, windy, shady, bright, calm, loud, quiet, fragrant or fetid?

- **Predict Recurring Events.** As a good researcher foresees the factors affecting an issue, the landscape designer should know what forces to expect. Where is the given property's fire sector, its thermal belt, the noisy road, the harsh glare of a neighbor's garage? When is it likely to rain? When are the first and last frost dates for area? During each solstice and equinox where will it be shady or bright?

- **Create Convenience.** Just as a good surgeon organizes his operating room efficiently, the landscape designer should make life on the land as effortless as possible. Keep the barbeque, compost, and trash enclosure close to a kitchen door; the woodpile near the fireplace; and the kid's playset in view of the living room. Where

will there be foot traffic? Where and when will people wish to be outside?

- **Consider Relationships.** Just as a good artist knows her medium and appreciates how its components interact, the landscape designer must understand both the intrinsic characteristics of the components she wishes to use and the way in which these components relate to the entire design. Would fragrant lavender work nicely under an often open window? Yes, but so would the thorny rose, and the rose also offers the added benefit of security under a window thanks to its sharp barbs.

- **Propose Options.** Just as a good worker often suggests ideas for her boss, the landscape designer must finally suggest various options for her client. Would you like the fragrant tree in spring that shades the patio in summer and doesn't block the neighbor's fulgent garage in the winter? Or would you like an inodorous evergreen that provides less shade in summer but more wind protection in April while occluding the ugly view?



NATE DOWNEY

More strategies exist, but no more will fit within the confines of this short column.

*Nate Downey (424-4444, www.santafepermaculture.com) is president of Santa Fe Permaculture, a locally owned landscape-design firm. His first book, *Harvest the Rain*, will be published this year by Sunstone Press. His second book will be a water harvesting "how-to" published by the State of New Mexico.*