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GARDEN NOTES

CREATE A SECLUDED ROOM IN YOUR GARDEN

By Dennis Hinkamp

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How can you create some privacy of your own without building an ugly, eight-foot fence or wall around your yard? One of the answers is to create a small area or room right in the landscape.

Envision the landscape as an extension of your home, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Most landscapes consist of one large backyard room, which doesn't provide much privacy. Think how impersonal your home would be if it had only one large room.

"Use shrubs, other plants and structures to create spaces or rooms in the landscape," he says. "For many families, one large area in the backyard is the best layout. My backyard is sort of a multi-purpose room. It serves as a soccer or baseball field, playground with swings, garden plot, orchard, berry patch, badminton court and even a rabbit run. Creating a small nook for those private times is difficult."

The trick is to find a slightly less used area, Goodspeed says. This can be a corner beside the house, behind the garage or behind a tree. Some people have even built their private area up in a tree. Like any room, once the location is determined the next decision is what size to make it and where to place the walls. For instance, envision a small room that at least has space for a nice reading chair or perhaps a hammock.

Walls can be created using any number of materials, he explains. Shrubs, wooden structures, flower beds, pots or small trees are all effective ways to give an area a feeling of seclusion and comfort. Creating an out-of-the-way space does not mean the area is completely cut off from the rest of the backyard.

For example, attach a small pergola (a 5 x 8 foot wooden structure much like an arbor) to the back of a garage or house, then train vines to grow over the top, he says. Clematis vines or grapes growing up the four poles and draped over the top give a feeling of sitting in a distant, tropical forest yet provide a view of the family playing just a few feet away.

Another restful spot can also be created under a shade tree, using eight or nine pots of shade-loving plants set in a small semi-circle surrounding a couple of lawn chairs, he adds. Again, this provides a pleasant, restful area without completely cutting off the view of the rest of the yard. It's sort of like sitting in the living room while the children play games in the next

room.

Flower beds can also be designed to divide off a small section of the yard in a back corner, Goodspeed says. Use a stepping stone path to lead to the room, which could be surrounded with shrubs and perennials. Once in the secluded nook, you are indeed away from the rest of the yard and world.

"I am a firm believer in taking time to get away and just sit, meditate and enjoy nature and some quiet time," he says. "Creating a small area in the yard makes it a little easier to retreat from the world and also adds interest to the landscape. Besides, you never know when it might come in handy as a place to escape those pesky calls from salesmen."

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