CREATING A ROCK GARDEN

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Rock gardens may be traced back to ancient China and the hanging gardens of Babylon
A steep bank planted in phlox, aubriela and alyssum may be called a rock garden – but dedicated rock gardeners would call it a rockery.
A steep bank becomes a true rock garden when its soil is modified to host a range of plants that would otherwise not grow there.
Rocks may be few and provide a strong contrast to plants – and a cool run for their roots
They may be the dominant element of the landscape, set in a naturalistic strata with a few small flowers and dwarf conifers.
Rock gardens can be expansive or as small as a few square feet.

They use space in complex ways with rock placement and steep slopes.
Rocks and slopes, paired with different soil mixture, create an infinite number of micro-climates.
A phenomenal number of plants can live in a compact rock garden.

True rock gardens are approached with a great deal of patience. The garden mellows with the years, plants and rocks become more harmonious.
Most individuals think of a raised bed studded with stones, compact shrubs and perennials as a rock garden.
People who identify themselves as rock gardeners define the term ‘rock garden’ more elaborately
A rock garden is a specialized habitat created to enable the gardener to grow a wide range of plants that demand particular soil and drainage conditions.
ROCK GARDEN
STYLE, DESIGN
AND AESTHETICS

Mother nature is the best
teacher and provides rock
gardeners with a world of
pleasing examples
In creating your own garden – decide on a selection of various materials – rocks, boulders, gravel should suit your site
Construction of a rock garden with quarried stratified rocks
Rock gardens imply some artistic arrangement, but rock gardens grow and evolve as gardeners acquire a larger plant collection.
PATHS AND HARDSCAPING
A rock garden is the least transitory type of garden. It may be there long after your house has been abandoned or replaced.
An important consideration is access to the garden - the path visitors will walk to see the garden.
Paths should be planned into the design of the garden – they are not an afterthought
Paths in a naturalistic setting should be lower in grade – excavated below surrounding terrain
Paths should be linear – leading the eye onward
Water features are also a natural addition to the hardscape to be constructed during the initial phase of garden design and construction. They add considerably more cost to the project.
SOILS
Soils can be as simple or complex as you like. Rock fragments are usually the main constituent of a rock garden.
For greater rewards – tailor your soil choices to your planting preferences and climate

- Rock particles (2 parts – $\frac{1}{4}$” of smaller)
- Organic material (1 part compost)
- Loam (1 part sandy river loam)
Lean soils – or scree – consist predominantly of rock particles
CHOICE OF SITE
Type of garden you construct will largely be a factor of the site location:

- Scale should fit with the home/property
  - Exposure to sunlight
  - Proper drainage
  - Provision for water features
- Ease of access for bulky heavy material and equipment
Have a plan before construction

• Save time
• Save money
TYPES OF ROCK GARDENS
FLAT GARDENS

A flat garden is usually built around or within a patio or sitting area.
BERMS

Raising rock gardens above flat ground

• Improves privacy
• Adds interest
• Emphasize the height of screening trees or shrubs
• Create paths
BERMS (continued)

• Gives more planting space than flat surface
• Many choice plants grow better on alpine slopes
  • Provides better drainage
• Offers more than one kind of exposure to the sun
MORAINE AND
SCREE GARDENS
Scree is the lean gravely soil that many alpine plants prefer.
Moraine garden is a scree garden with a steady supply of underground moisture. It simulates the underground flow from melting snow in mountain glaciers.
Flow of water in a natural moraine
Schematic drawing of an artificial moraine
Moraine – This garden emulates the debris left after a glacier recedes
CREVICE GARDEN
Crevice garden is a type of rock garden where most of the surface is composed of closely set stones
Designed more for plants favorable to high alpine zones
PLANTED WALLS
&
FORMAL RAISED BEDS
In the wild, some plants seem to grow right from solid rock, trailing down boulders, flowering on cliff faces.
Desire to create this kind of garden is for those who want to grow highly specialized plants
Walls can also be used to support free standing elevated beds
FOR THE ROCK GARDEN PURIST
Rock gardens are like a child’s sandbox full of toys. In a limited space one can play with plants from varied habitats and regions.
Collectors can amass hundreds of species in a typical city yard

- Delicate European alpines
- Tough native plants
- New discoveries from far-away mountain ranges
Rock gardens plants are slow growing – you may want to plant some more common varieties which are quicker growing to give color and size early on.
As the garden matures you can replace the plants with rarer species
BASIC ROCK GARDEN PRINCIPLES
Rock gardens should be open and uncluttered as possible.

Size and placement of rocks should be bold and generous.
Rocks should be significant rather than numerous. Should appear settled – harmonious in color and texture.
Avoid overplanting. You can obscure the rock framework and sacrifice individual character of plants.
Don’t forget accent plants – distinctive in color, texture and form
Start with plants easier to cultivate, those more hardy, ‘friendly.’ As experience grows move to more challenging plants.
Basket of Gold
Soapwort
Sage
Phlox
Phlox and Blue Fescue
Bleeding Hearts
Find out as much as possible about kind of plants before buying and planting

• Height
• Spread
• Likely life span
Sargents Weeping Hemlock
Avoid plants that can become weedy or problems in years ahead

• Grape hyacinth
• Common bellflowerflower (campanula rapunculoides)
Minimize or avoid altogether synthetic materials – i.e. concrete, brick, anything plastic
Be selective in plants. Put nothing in your garden simply because you have it.

Avoid studding rock garden with distracting labels.
CONCLUSION

Many seasoned gardeners have turned to rock gardening because in some ways - it represents the pinnacle of horticultural endeavor, where scientific manipulation of the garden and artistic expression become one
PLANTS FOR THE ROCK GARDEN
Dwarf Conifers

Some examples of most common slow growing conifers suitable for rock gardens.
Dwarf Balsam Fir

*Abies balsamea nana* – 2 ½’ high – 20’ wide in about 30 years
Dwarf Weeping Cedar of Lebanon
*Cedrus libani* Sargentii
12-14” before branches start to weep
Dwarf Hinoki Cypress
*Chamaecyparis obtusa*
‘nana’
At 30 years plant is 10-15” high, 15-20” wide.
Dwarf common juniper
Juniperus communis compressa

Columnar shrub – 3’ in 30 years
Dwarf weeping Norway spruce

*Picea abies* 'inversa'

Rounded mound about 3’ tall
Bird's-nest spruce

*Picea abies* ‘nidiformis’

At 20 years about 20” high-twice as wide
Dwarf Alberta spruce

*Picea glauca ‘conica’*

At 20 years 4’ high – 2’ wide
Shrubs Suitable for Rock Gardens

All of the following thrive in well drained soil in full sun or partial shade
Creeping Barberry

Berberis wilsoniae

Brilliant scarlet in autumn
Heather

*Calluna vulgaris*

Likes acidic soil
Creeping cotoneaster
*Cotoneaster adpressus*

In the fall displays bright red fruit and scarlet leaves
Prostrate broom
*Cytisus decumbens*
Green twigs that suggest a small broom-bright yellow flowers in late spring
Shrubby cinquefoil  
*Potentilla fruticosa*

Flowering in late spring. Flowers range from yellow-orange to white and even red.
PLANTS FOR ROCK GARDENS

Some uncommon plants are rare and more unusual. Not found in most nurseries but are available in the Salt Lake valley.
New Zealand Burr
*Acaena saccaticupula* ‘Blue Haze’

Full shade-evergreen groundcover
Star of Persia
*Allium christophii*

Enormous 10” flower globes – terrific accent plant
Plume Flower
Astible chinensis ‘Pumila’
Lavender pink plumes
Carpathian Bellflower
*Campanula carpatica* ‘Blue Chips’
Covered with upward facing sky-blue flowers June - October
Pinks

*Dianthus ‘Bouquet Purple’*

Blooms all season – lavender pink flower
Scotts Spleenwort
Asplenium ebenoides
Dwarf fern – adaptable to alkaline soils
Edelweiss
*Leontopodium alpinum*

Alpine plant from Swiss Alps
Bitterroot

*Lewisia ‘Constant Comment’*

Fuscia pink blossoms in spring
Pincushion Flower
Scabiosa caucasica
‘Fama’
Intense lavender-blue flowers all summer
Campion
Silene caryophylloides
From Turkish mountains in limestone scree.
Large pink-magenta flowers