



## GARDEN NOTES

# THE DIRT AS YOUR CANVAS

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September 1999

Summer-30

Weird creatures that we are, we tend to focus on the dirty speck on a dinner plate or the one blemish we see in that otherwise perfect face in the mirror.

This can happen in your home landscape, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. What is the focal point of your landscape? I have seen landscapes with a big black or blue garbage can as the focal point.

Consider where the eye is drawn in your landscape, Goodspeed explains. For most landscapes, the focus should be toward the front door of the house. An entrance should look inviting and friendly, not unattractive and surrounded by pyracantha. Part of this process is evaluating how your landscape and home is viewed by most people. Place a focal point where you want attention drawn.

There are many different ways to grab the eye and focus on a certain area or direction, he says. Plants with shapes, colors or textures that are different from others in the rest of the landscape can accomplish this. Examples are a Japanese maple, purple smoke tree or a contorted filbert planted near the front porch. Unusual shapes and colors draw attention to the plants.

“We often think an object must be large to be a point of emphasis,” Goodspeed says. “However, a small attractive planter box or grouping of flowers can gain the attention of a wandering eye as quickly as a large planting. It is usually the unexpected or one different plant that gets the attention.”

A focal point can also draw the eye away from an ugly scene or an objectionable view, he says. It can direct the observer to the mountains and away from the weed patch next door. A fence or hedge is often thought of as the only way to hide bad views. Another option is to create an image that is more desirable to view.

“I prefer more than one focal point in a landscape,” he says. “This keeps it interesting and adds more depth. A nice planting with a beautiful small shrub by the front door can be complimented with another planting on the other side of the house or by the sidewalk. Incorporate a few of the same plants in both places along with some that are different to add interest and emphasis.”

“I have seen many homes with no focal point,” he adds. “They may have juniper planted along the entire foundation with a couple of other evergreens sporadically planted around the yard. Usually this accents any flaws in the house or maybe the power or water meter because they are different from anything else in the yard. Adding a couple of interesting deciduous plants or perennials to the landscape can suddenly brighten an otherwise boring landscape.”

Once a focal point has been determined and a plant is placed in that area, Goodspeed suggests developing the surrounding bed by adding other plants as an accent. Use plants that you enjoy and like. This promotes continuity and interest.

Next time you are standing in the front of your home, take a look around and determine your landscape's focal point, he says. If you don't like it, change it. Bring in a plant or two and focus the view where you want it. Above all, make sure you like it, whether it is the front door, the blooming perennials, a favorite tree or the garbage can.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 9 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/09/1998/DF)