

Concepts That Guided My Landscaping

by Al Kyte

Shortly after moving to Moraga in 1972 and finding myself with a garden of lawn, Algerian ivy, and hedges of Juniper, I enrolled in a U.C. Extension class on "Attracting Birds to your Yard." Immediately I saw the potential and challenge of using California Native Plants to surround myself with the type of habitat I already was enjoying in my fly fishing and back packing.

As I begun to transform our yard, project by project, I benefited from books on native plants and Japanese gardening as well as from conversations with experts such as Glen Schneider, Phil Johnson, Wayne Roderick, and Lester Hawkins. More than 30 years later, I am still experimenting, learning, and enjoying.

Selected Landscaping Concepts

1. "Borrowing:" The Japanese speak of "borrowing from your neighbor's landscape." So, before starting my planting, I studied the plants of my neighbors to see ways to build continuity. I found I was able to add pine trees to a multi-trunked Monterey Pine of my neighbor and thus create a larger woodland than I had room to create myself.
2. "Sight lines:" I like viewing the area to be planted from obvious vantage points, such as from up and down the street, selected outdoor locations, and from inside the house. These primary sight lines become important reference angles from which to evaluate potential additions to the garden.
3. "Reconstructing the Past:" I like to think back to the time before houses were built on a location. What plants might have been there? Might this have been a chaparral area, oak/pine woodland, savannah, mountain meadow, or riparian plant community? Rather than just putting in a lawn, I like to reconstruct the most attractive plant community that might have existed before. I even consider recreating a moment in time in the succession of plant life that would occur in nature.
4. "Contouring/grading:" Before planting, I like to rework the earth to enhance any natural sloping, drainage patterns, and mounding for plants. This contouring should also enhance the views from the primary sight lines.
5. "Spacing:" I have been influenced by Japanese garden books to maintain a balance between the space taken up by plants, rock, and water (or suggestion of water). As plants grow, some will need to be pruned back or removed to maintain this balance.
6. "Vertical Balance:" When possible, I try to maintain a balance in a vertical plane, providing some areas of only low-growing plant life (i.e. flowers), some of medium

height (i.e. shrubs), and some of taller growing plants (i.e. trees). I want to achieve smooth transitions between these levels.

7. "Seasons:" I try to consider seasonal variations as I plant, including fall leaf color, the interaction of evergreen and deciduous plants, as well as sequence of flower bloom in each area of the yard.
8. "Naturalness of Rock:" I like to use one kind of rock as much as possible in an area, spaced and imbedded at the same slant to give the impression of natural rock formations.
9. "Color:" I like to try for a balance of red, blue, yellow, and white (or off shades of orange, pink, or purple) throughout the summer months (as well as in Spring) in the wild flower areas of my yard.
10. "Internal Consistency:" Each plant and rock should contribute significantly to the primary intent or theme of the area in which it has been located as well as to the overall theme of the garden itself. This is the opposite of "eclectic" planting, in which items have no apparent relationship to surrounding plants or to any overall theme.
11. "Curving Lines:" Curving edges and pathways are generally more natural appearing and pleasing to the eye than straight-line angle changes.
12. "Unity of the overall environment:" Being able to "see through" the branches of a tree to the sky beyond or "walk through" rather than around my plantings contribute to a oneness or unity of landscape.
13. "Transition to Wilderness:" As I move away from the house, I want my pathways and plantings to transition from civilized and cultivated to natural and wild.
14. "Animal Friendly:" I like to add elements that provide cover, water, and food opportunities for various forms of wildlife. Elements such as water features, bird feeders, brush or wood piles, nesting boxes, and rock clusters enhance the habitat. I am currently planning ways to create a better habitat for butterflies as well.