

When John and I moved to Euclid we found a barren wasteland. Originally, we looked at condos, since we were both in aviation at the time. We were convinced that we wouldn't have time or even be interested in yard work. But after looking at more than 20 houses we knew we had found our home.

We started small and, within a couple of years, became addicted to plants and gardening. Every weekend was spent plant hunting. We'd come home & slowly increased the size of our beds!

One thing led to another and after some serious health issues with both John and I, I realized that I couldn't go back to my job as a Flight Attendant. John was disabled and, knowing that flying was taking its toll on me, encouraged me to take a leap of faith to start my own business - Garden PHD / Practicing Horticulture Differently.

John and I give multiple garden tours of The Japanese Maple Garden during the growing season and I am frequently asked how to take what we've achieved in our garden and apply similar design ideas and principals to different settings.

Here are some tips to remember when you're wondering how to update your own garden. Remember that Form, Color & Texture are your best friends. If you mix form and texture, you will achieve an interesting aesthetic, even when most plants are different shades of green. This will create a mood of tranquility and can even have a modern feel as you repeat form throughout.

Adding pops of color with brightly colored leaves can help draw the eye but, also, can say a lot about a homeowner's personality and taste.

I always tell garden visitors and clients alike – do what feels right for you. You have to live with your creation and what is pleasing to one

person is not necessarily what is pleasing to the next!

Let's face it, there are always changes to be made. Whether you're a lover of *all* plants and in need of the latest beauty, your garden requires a plant replacement or you're yearning for changes, our gardens are always evolving.

When modifying your garden, remember these four principals: Form, Color, Texture & *REPETITION*. Each principal on its' own will offer interest. Combining two or more of them will add a sense of cohesiveness in your space.

When you visited our garden, you would have noticed the curved walkways. Curves are used to beckon the garden visitor on a slow journey through the garden - form, color, texture and repetition all work to draw the eye beyond.

Think about the movement of your beds – the different views from different locations. What you see from one angle may only slightly show from another, allowing plants to be revealed.

"Hide & Reveal" is a Japanese gardening technique. The idea is that, as you are slowed by the curves, you shed the stresses of everyday life and when you arrive at the destination, you are free to enjoy the fullness of tranquility and beauty. In addition, the visitor pays attention to their surroundings.

In the Japanese Maple Garden, I have tucked plants here, there and everywhere. Slowing the journey through the garden gives the visitor the chance to see the variety of plants on display.

Some gardeners think they have to layer plants from tall to short. I would argue the opposite. Instead, tuck plants in wherever you can. Not only does layering help with weed control, but sitting in or near the garden provides an entirely different perspective. Plants that couldn't be seen when you walk by can now be appreciated when you're lower and farther away.

Yet another take-away from The Japanese Maple Garden is the four-season element. Being from the Bahamas where everything is lush throughout the year, the dreary days in winter would take their toll on me. The Japanese Maples and dwarf perennials add a lush feel in Spring & Summer, while providing spectacular Fall displays. In Winter the evergreens and Japanese Maples anchor the garden and add life to an otherwise barren landscape.

In the summer months, there is less contrast between some of the plants. Yet, the varying shades of green offers a sense of peace while complimenting other colors in the garden. A recent visitor said, "WOW, I didn't know there are so many different shades of green! I find it so peaceful". The appreciation of form and texture were revealed to her.

*Learn from nature and adapt aspects of the wild and how plants grow.*

The form of the evergreens and Japanese Maples have been placed in such a way that we feel like we are a part of nature.

Since we are now in the midst of winter, this is the time to consider the upcoming growing season and any changes you might want to make. That way, when the weather breaks you can get to work.

Most designers will tell you to plan your garden. A simple sketch of existing garden beds can be helpful when you buy plants.

I prefer not to plan and work best when I use the plants as my paint and the garden as a canvas. Some of my clients require designs and some do not – they are willing to trust me. In the end, those projects where I am allowed to be creative without a plan on paper end up being my favorite spaces. But, in the end, I would tell you to do what works for you.

Always take into consideration the structures on the property, lighting and water requirements. Choose plants specific to your site.

I recommend choosing your trees first, followed by shrubs, then perennials. If you have an existing area that needs a renovation and the time is right to divide or even eliminate perennials, consider adding evergreens to contrast the surrounding plants. Keep in mind the new plant's growing requirements for health and vigor.

Lay out your beds & research your plants, then find a nursery supplier. If you want to incorporate dwarf evergreen trees & shrubs, note that they are priced according to rarity, size and time spent growing at the nursery. The trade-off for Japanese Maples and dwarf evergreens can be enjoyed during all four seasons and require less long-term maintenance.

What about budget? Do you have a few hundred or few thousand? Gear your project to what you can afford. Don't be afraid to start small. After all, The Japanese Maple Garden was borne out of the smallest of projects.

If the budget is small you can source plants from neighbors, family or friends. I always encourage people to share their plants with neighbors – what a great way to build relationships in your community. Doing so may, also, encourage new homeowners to maintain and beautify their own properties.

I grew up in Spanish Wells, Bahamas where homes have lush plantings and fences or arbors with vines. Lawns are complimentary as opposed to the primary feature of the landscape. It's where I gained my appreciation for the sense of privacy and the need to see our plants, instead of having them tucked neatly against the house.

We didn't start out wanting to remove our grass. Instead, the bigger the beds became, the more mowing became tedious and time consuming, so we weighed our options. Do we go with mulch, stone or groundcovers? We chose stone in the front garden – silica/lucky stone from Best Sand in Chardon, to be exact. We had a lot of comments – some positive and some negative.

So, how do you feel about grass? Have you considered going lawnless? I, personally, find it to be much easier to maintain than having extensive lawn care maintenance requirements year after year.

Other factors that can have an impact on your garden are boulders and art or an interesting object or objects.

Boulders don't need water or pruning! You can sit on them or use them for funneling water away from a particular area. They can be functional, while adding a natural feel to the landscape.

A piece of art or an interesting object can be useful in a long, narrow space or around a corner where an unexpected item can add to the feel of your space.

We've kept it simple in our garden. Although, we do have an extensive collection of Bonsai and a couple of Buddha statues tucked here and there, but the colors are not explosive.

In a friend's garden, however, you'll find brightly colored figures and loads of flowers. It's a matter of preference, but I would encourage you to find at least one item that will stand out, drawing the eye to a particular area of your garden. It can be as simple as a colorful bench or birdbath or a large pot.

Spring, summer and fall offer everchanging leaf colors. Many different varieties of Japanese

Maples can act as an accent or "feature" in any setting. It's incredible that such varieties exist!

When my husband said he wanted a third one I thought he was crazy! And I let him know it! He told me to "trust him" & he ordered JD Vertrees Book on Japanese Maples. All I had to do was look through it and I was hooked! After my initial resistance, I gave in. I, too, caught the bug!

In a nutshell, Japanese Maples are slow growing and maintenance is minimal. Unfortunately, they do cost more, but if you can invest in just a few you'll enjoy them throughout the year.

So, what are you looking for when you go to the nursery?

1. Locate the root flare. It is always best to avoid trees with girdling roots. \* When planting you'll also need to spread those roots outward to encourage HEALTHY root development. A bonsai root hook works well. If you find roots wrapped around the trunk during planting, use an old pair of prunes to prune the roots away unless you can manipulate them to spread outward. DO NOT use those pruners for pruning – keep them for use around soil only!
2. Look for black areas on trunk. If you see this DO NOT purchase. It is a sign of a bacterial or fungal infection.

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### Planting a Japanese Maple or Conifer:

2 Parts: Pine Bark – Shredded or Mini-nuggets

1 Part: Pine Fines

1 Part: Garden Magic Topsoil

### Planting in a Pot:

2 Parts: Pine Fines – Cahoon's Garden Center

2 Parts: Espoma Soil Perfecter – Cahoon's Garden Center

1 Part: Silica Sand / Source from Best Sand in Chardon OR Gale's, Willoughby – DO NOT use Play Sand

### Fertilizer:

PHC Roots – Organic, slow release, in a form that plants can easily use, contains beneficial microbes

Plant or Rose Tone – Easy to find at local garden centers

Note: Synthetic fertilizers force plants to use up sugars in order to help break down the synthetic products. The problem is that bugs like a low sugar content. I used to think that the opposite is true (that bugs like a high sugar content) but I recently saw an episode of Tennessee Master Gardeners where they addressed the subject.

We have used different products and we have found that PHC Roots is, by far, the best that we have come across for use in The Japanese Maple Garden.

### **Do's:**

- Learn how to prune your Japanese Maples
- Use a hose on "jet" setting to remove dead foliage on conifers
- Use clean, sharp pruners
- Water during hot, dry periods
- Protect Japanese Maples in Spring, during frost forecasts
- Fertilize with PHC Roots 7-7-7 (order online from Amazon or AM Leonard)
- Holly-tone, Plant-tone and Rose-tone are good products

### **Don't:**

- Plant too low – Plant at a height of 6-8". This allows 2-3 inches for settling
- Use Miracle Gro on ornamentals
- Use the same pruners that you use on roots
- Over-water: Once per week during dry periods

Adapted from a garden talk –

*By MaryAnn Thesing*