

# 24 1/2 Garden Design Ideas

Easy to implement rules that help you create a WOW garden!



*"I use all of these ideas when I design my own gardens" Robert Pavlis*



**Garden  
Fundamentals**

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# Introduction

One of the best ways to improve your design ability is to critique other gardens. By looking at a landscape which you're not intimately familiar with, you are better able to see both the good and bad of the design. I learn a lot by wandering the neighborhood and looking at front yard gardens. At each one I ask myself some important questions.

- ❖ What do I like about the design?
- ❖ What don't I like about the design?
- ❖ Is it functional?
- ❖ How much work is required to maintain it?
- ❖ Were the plantings done correctly?
- ❖ Does it contain some design elements that I could use?

I am really asking the same questions I ask myself when creating a new design except that I am working with an existing landscape and not trying to picture one in my mind. This makes the whole process so much easier.

Imagine standing in front of a yard containing nothing but grass. Now you have to answer the question, how do I make the space functional and appealing? For most of us, including myself, this is not easy. It is hard to visualize a finished garden when all you have is grass or some old tired flower beds.

It is much easier to answer the question while standing in someone else's garden. By going through this process you are training yourself to think about design aspects. You are learning how to design and when it comes time to work on your own garden you will have an easier time answering the questions.

To create this book I went for a walk in the neighborhood, took pictures of front yards, and then analysed them. On the following pages I will critique each yard and look at a number of aspects to determine the good and bad in each garden. Follow along with me and you will learn a lot about garden design.

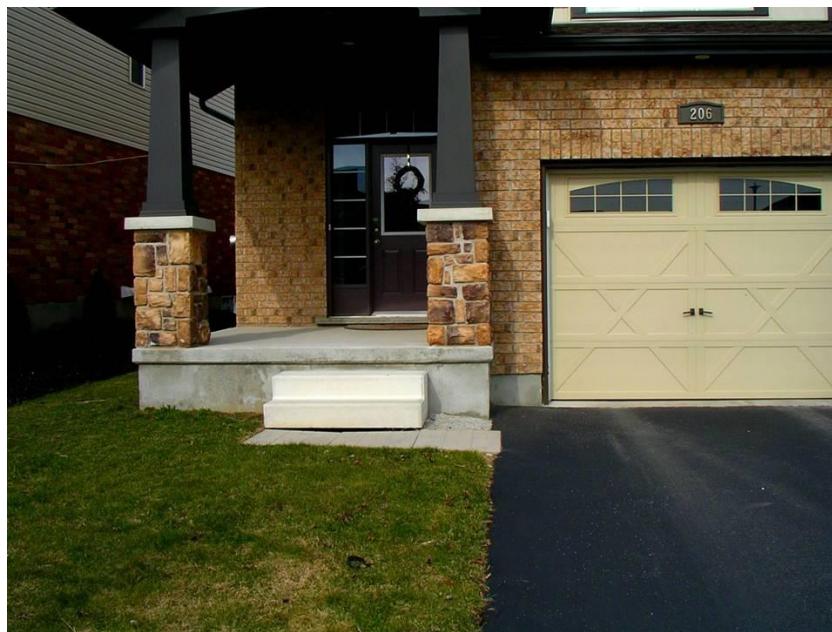
It is not important that you agree with my comments. Design is a very personal thing and each of us has our own likes and dislikes. If you disagree with me, that is a good thing. You and I are different. We will never make the same design decisions, nor should we.

If this book helps you better understand your own wants and needs in the garden I will consider it a success.

# The Cookie-Cutter Neighborhood

This first section looks at a number of homes (1 to 7) that are all on the same street. The street is a very typical new neighborhood around here. Each home is almost the same, but the builder has made minor cosmetic changes to make each look a bit different.

They are about 6 years old and have very small front yards, which is quite common these days. The small size makes design easier and more complicated at the same time. It is easy because your options are limited but it can be difficult to make a small garden look special and different from the neighbor's yard.



The above home has had no work done to it. The builder left some crummy builder-quality steps, added a minimum number of patio stones and some grass.

All of the homes in this section have the same size and shape of yard. This is their starting point.

All of the pictures were taken in late fall. You might think it's kind of an odd time to be looking at gardens but it is actually the perfect time. The snow has not yet covered things up so you can see everything clearly and you are not blinded by pretty colorful flowers because they are all finished. At this time of year you get to see the real bones of the garden which are the important part of a good design.

Anyone can buy a lot of annuals and make a garden look good in mid-summer. Good design makes it look good all year long.

### **STOP – Don't read past the next paragraph!**

Close the book right after reading this paragraph. Come up with your own design for the yard pictured above. Then return to the book and compare your design to actual gardens and my comments.

## Home #1

I have a hard time saying anything positive here; it would look better with just grass. The shape of the bed conflicts with the square shape of everything else in the yard. The tree is ok and once planted it does need something around it, even if it's only mulch. This is mostly a functional thing that keeps lawnmowers from damaging the trunk.



I guess the stones were added to make the bed look a bit more natural, but the shape of the bed is very formal. It's very difficult for even experienced designers to mix formal and natural design and make it look good. For us mere mortals it is a good idea to stick to one or the other.

The edging is common plastic edging. It looks ok when first installed, but in our zone 5 climate, frost heave in winter always moves it. In no time at all it looks crappy.

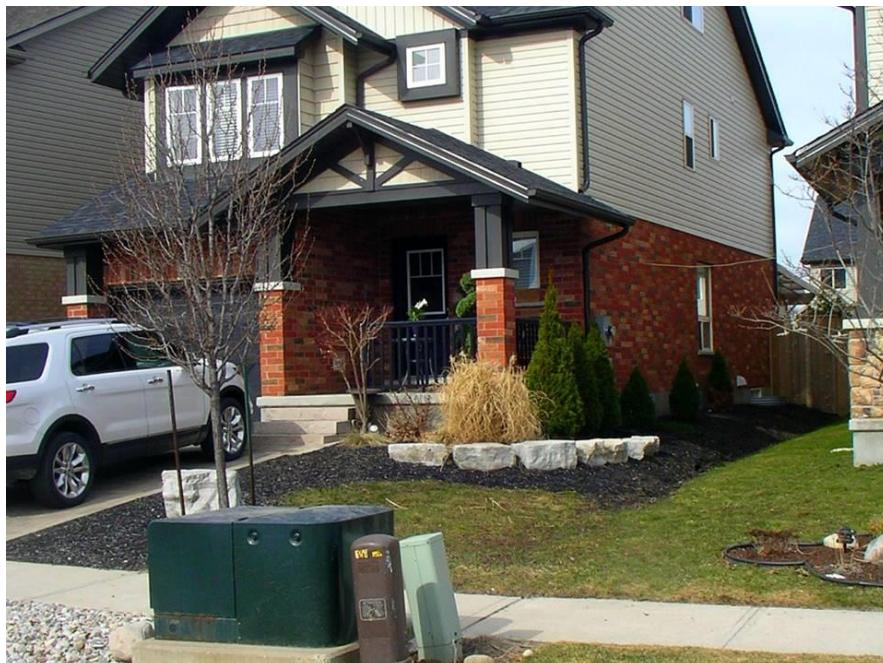
What about maintenance? How do you trim the grass around the bed? You could use scissors, or maybe there is a miniature lawn mower available? If I have to choose between a good looking design and low maintenance, I will almost always pick the latter.

## Home #2

This is the house next door to #1. The brickwork is different, but the house layout is the same.

The planting bed softens the hard brick corner of the house while adding interest. A mixture of evergreens and grasses provide a pleasing view, even now when most vegetation is finished for winter.

The stones, locally called armor stone, are ok but in this region they are over used. Trying to make your home look different from the neighbors is difficult if everyone is using the same building material



What purpose do the stones serve? The round curve made with the stones helps hold back the soil in the bed – there is a slight slope here, so they do have functionality. By placing them in a curve they help to soften the hard lines of the house and driveway. I am undecided if I really like the garden, but it is a big improvement over home #1.



What about the single big rock beside the tree in front? I guess they had one left over and didn't know what to do with it. It doesn't really add anything to the landscape and it's not even a special looking rock.

Notice the low section between the homes. This is known as a swale and its purpose is to collect water away from the homes. By law, in this jurisdiction, you are not allowed to remove it.

They widened the original paved driveway with brick so they could park 2 cars. It is not great looking but it is certainly functional.

The bed between the road and the sidewalk is affectionately called the hellstrip because it is a nightmare to design and maintain. Getting rid of the grass certainly helps with maintenance, but the selection of rock doesn't match anything in the garden. You get the feeling that the gardens on either side of the sidewalk were designed by different people.

The tree was planted at least 4 years ago. Newly planted trees rarely need staking and if they do, you should only use one stake. For proper development it is important that the tree sways in the wind so all stakes should be removed within a year. This poor thing is being strangled by misguided kindness.

Here are some articles on tree planting that you might find interesting:

[Planting Trees the Right Way](#)

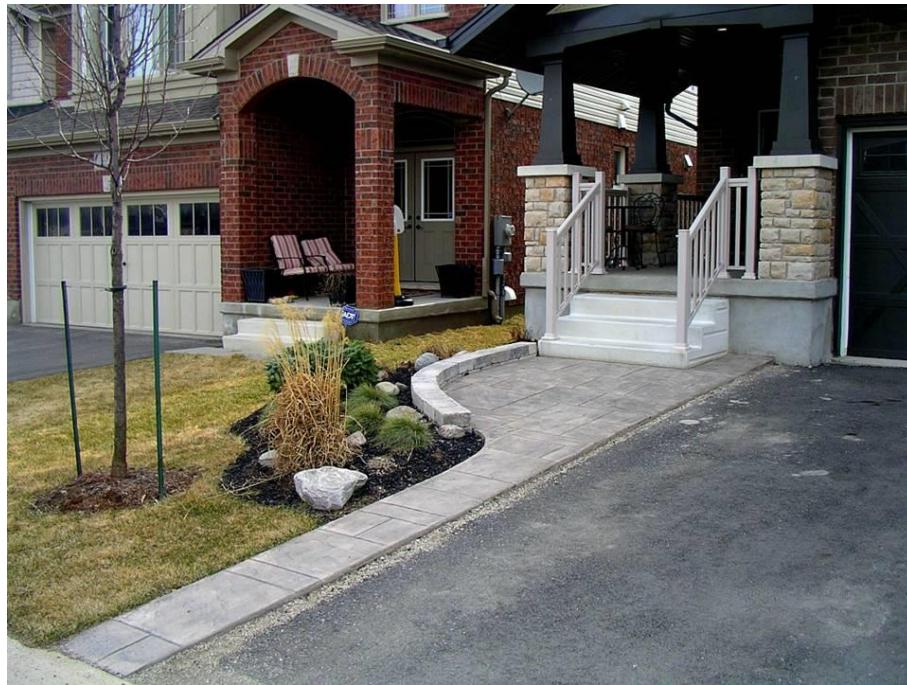
[Best Time to Plant Trees](#)

[Transplanting – Should You Reduce Top Growth?](#)

### Home #3

A few years ago a friend asked me to come out to their place and make some suggestions for redesigning their front yard. I looked around and told them they should replace the steps. They were expecting suggestions for the garden.

The house, especially the entry way becomes part of the garden, or is it the other way around? A well designed entry way will make or break a good garden design. The owners of this home have taken the ugly builder-steps and attached railings, making the steps part of the house.

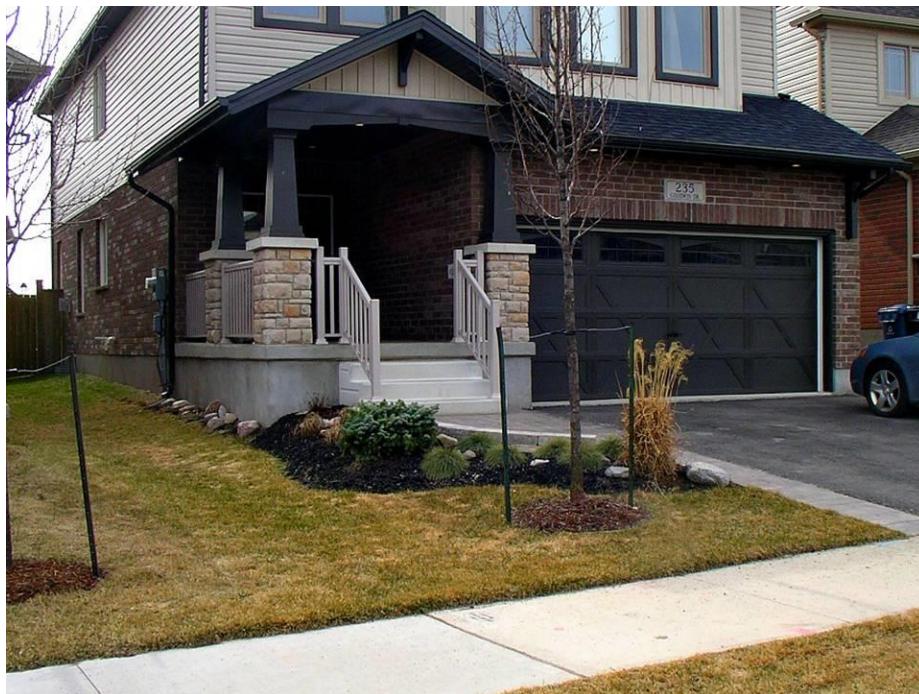


Compare the steps on this house with Home #1. The ones here are still ugly, but they look as if they belong.

Upgrading the entry way can add a much bigger wow factor than most garden upgrades.

The pathway is poured concrete with a pattern added to mimic patio stones. It's not bad looking and it is probably less likely to heave in winter than real stone, but real patio stones look much better.

The patio area at the bottom of the steps has been enlarged which gives it a much better scale than a smaller pathway. Scale is a design term that indicates that an item has appropriate proportions with respect to its surroundings.



Have a look at the edge of the garden on the grass side. The shape is a nice curve which looks better than straight lines in an informal garden. However, it is important that there is an obvious purpose to the curve (see Home #12). You should be able to answer the question, why does the curve exist? Don't just add curves because some design book says they are better.

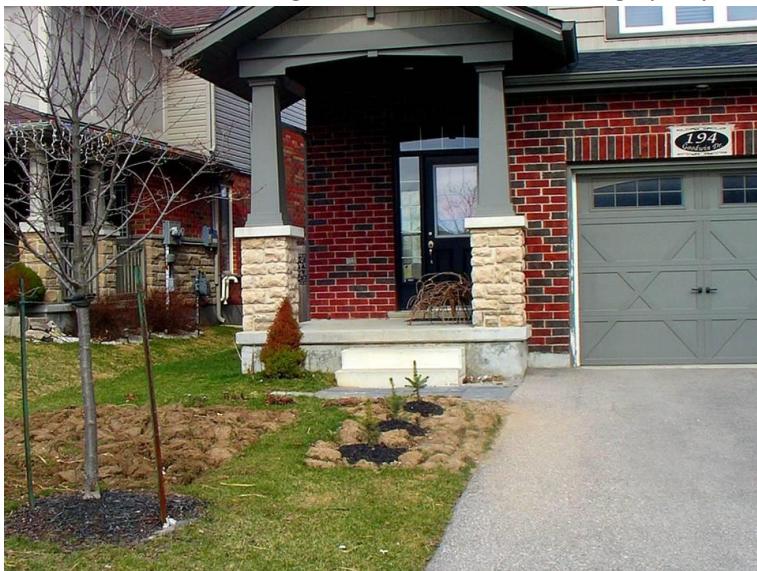
This particular bed has too many small curves and it looks odd because there is no reason for them.

The tree has its own small circular bed. Not only does this look lost, but mowing and edging the little bit of grass between this bed and the main bed adds unnecessary work. The whole thing would look so much better if the two beds were combined into one larger one.

## Home #4

The deciduous tree has been here for several years and has the obligatory circle around it. The owner is starting to make new beds where you see the brown rectangular sections.

There seems to be no logic for the beds from a design perspective. Why have two rectangles?



Why rectangles at all – the bed around the tree is round?

From a horticultural perspective, I hope you can see a big problem. The bed next to the driveway contains 3 evergreens that happen to be white spruce. Each one of these will become 80 feet tall and too wide for this front garden.

Contrary to what others say, it's ok to plant trees that will

outgrow their space, but they should have enough space for at least 10 years of growth. These guys will be too big in two years.

I had a close look at the beds. The owner turned the sod over, and planted. What you see is the brown soil from below the grass and the green grass growing between each shovel full. It not only looks bad, but the grass will be a nightmare to get out of the bed. Make sure you kill the grass before planting.



### Home #5



This garden contains a few shrubs and not much else. The shape does nothing from an aesthetic point of view. It is a very small space and you might as well have the bed go right up to the driveway. Or better still, just leave the grass. Environmentalists consider grass evil and want it all removed. We certainly grow too much of it, but there is a good reason for using it in a landscape. Contrary to popular opinion, it is easier to maintain than gardens and looks nice all of the time with limited maintenance.

There is nothing wrong with leaving grass where it fits. These driveways are narrow and when someone tries to get in or out of the car, they tend to step off the driveway. Grass is a perfect surface for this activity. When designing a garden, always consider the functional aspects.

I don't mind the shape of the bed too much, but what I really hate are the stones. They don't look very good but that is not the real problem. Can you imagine cutting and weeding the grass around them? Stones and grass do not go together for functional reasons. The combination always produces a high maintenance spot.

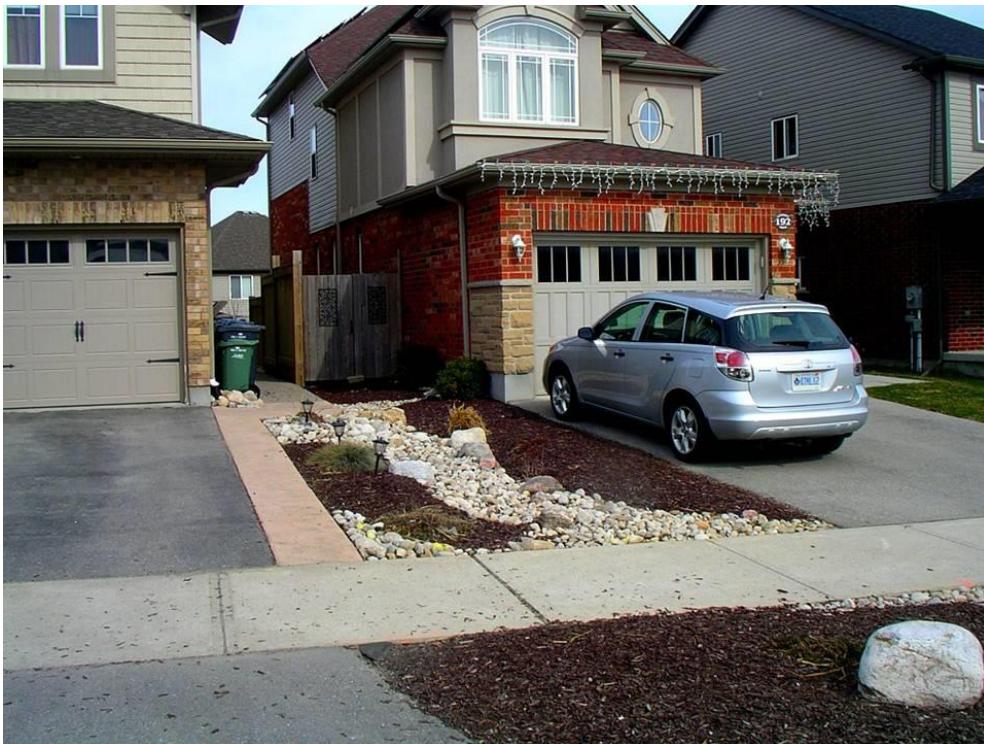
## Home #6

By now you probably think I don't like any garden design, but that is not the case. To be honest very little design effort went into some of the above gardens. This house on the other hand is a good example of a good design.

Remember the swale that exists between these homes? This seems like a problem for a garden but the best way to solve a problem is to embrace it. A swale is a place where water collects so the gardeners here decided to make it into a dry river bed.

They then added some planting beds to the left and to the right of the river. But notice how free flowing these are. The beds have curves but the curves seem to follow the slope of the land. The river is located in the lower sections exactly where you would expect it. The stream and beds feel like they belong together.

The river meanders through the area in a very natural looking way. No sharp turns here.



The plantings are new and too small to have much impact. In a couple of years they will help hide the sharp line between stones and soil, softening the edges even more.

This garden also has some larger rocks in the river. Compare them with Home #1 and #2. Here they seem to belong in the space because they are the right size and shape. In these kind of natural looking gardens it is important to make things look as if nature put them there. Ignore the car, driveway and homes. Then ask yourself, could this landscape could exist in nature?

Let's jump to the street side of the sidewalk. The river of stones does flow into this garden connecting the two gardens on either side of the sidewalk. They could have made the river on the road side a bit bigger. The same mulch is used in both gardens, again connecting the two.

And then they placed a big bolder right in the middle of the bed. Why? It does not belong here. Part of the reason is that the stone sits on top of the soil which makes it look man placed. It could have been sunk about half way in the soil and it would look a lot better. A larger shrub could be planted next to it and then the stone would not appear to be sticking out so much. The shrub would reduce the effective size of the rock, making it look more in scale.

There is another very important point about this design. Did you catch it? These two neighbors designed the space between their homes together. Or maybe it was one gardener who got the other neighbor to agree to let them use the space. In any event, the tiny space between the homes looks harmonious because both sides of the property are one garden. This looks so much better than each gardener doing their own thing.



This picture shows a closer view of the space between the two houses. Here each owner has their own style. The one on the left wanted a very functional concrete pathway to the back yard – nothing wrong with that. It is good use of the space.

The one on the right used the downspout from the house to naturally feed into the dry river bed, connecting the side yard to the front yard.

They also added a great looking gate which leads to the back yard. But there is a problem with the design. How do you get to the gate? You have to walk through the flower bed to get there. Some stepping stones could be added to make this gate look as if it actually belongs here.

## Home #7

This is another good example of two neighbors working together to create a cohesive bed between the two properties. They got rid of all the grass which is the best idea for such a small space. Who wants to mow a few square feet of grass?

The plantings are mostly shrubs with a good mixture of evergreen and deciduous plants. Even at this time of the year there are interesting things to look at. The large tree in front will almost certainly get too big, but it can be removed in a few years without affecting the look of the bed.



Most of the time it's best to pick a plant that will not outgrow the space. For small gardens, I really like miniature evergreens and weeping trees. Weeping trees can be trained into almost any size and height and are available in a variety of deciduous and evergreen types. This garden

has one near the back of the bed; you can see it better in the close-up picture.



The front entry way has been expanded and upgraded from the builder steps. In the close-up you can see some of the features in the brick stonework – very nice job. The color of the stone step was matched to the pathway. To add extra interest an inserted rectangle of a different color was added. Inside the rectangle, the

orientation of the stone was changed to add even more interest.

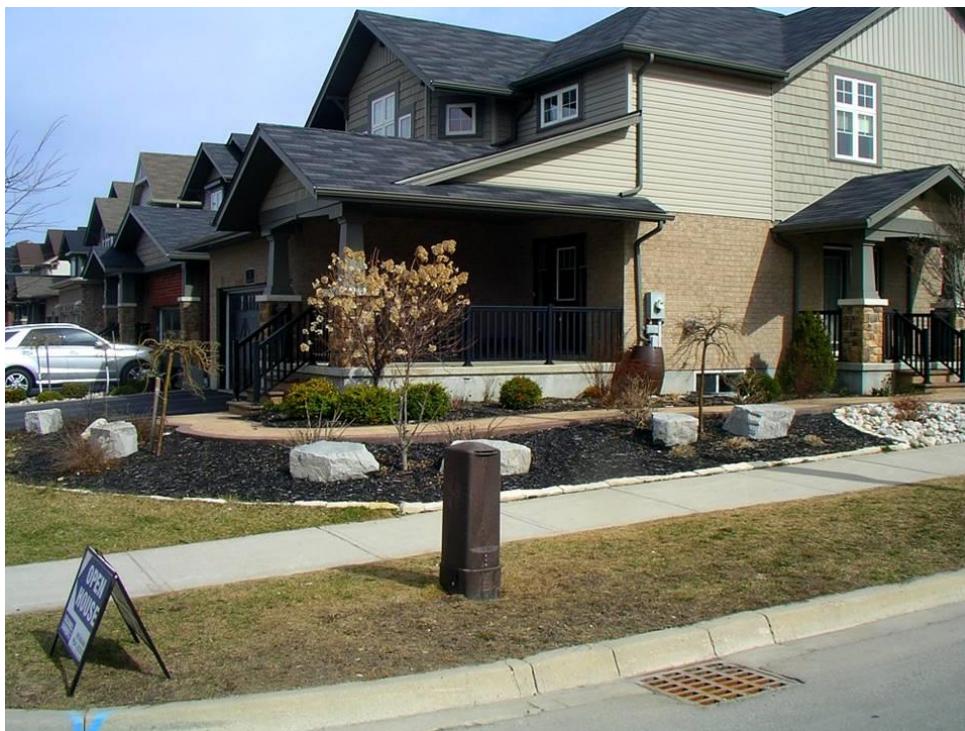
The step was made as wide as the porch would allow. This makes the entry way appear bigger and much more inviting. Compare this to home # 3 where they used a narrow set of stairs with a narrow railing.

The flower pots on either side polish off the elegant look.

The neighbor has used a slightly different size of brick, but matched the color. This makes the whole area feel as if it is one, resulting in a more spacious feel. Too much variation in a small space makes the space feel smaller. There is a fine line between variety to keep things interesting, and repetition to maintain harmony. These two owners have met that balance very nicely.

## Home #8

This next house is in the same neighbourhood, but not on the same street. The house sits on a busy corner which adds some complexity to the landscape design.



You can see that there is a bit of slope from the house to the sidewalk. This is an area where rain could be a problem because it washes soil and mulch onto the sidewalk. Gentle slopes are usually not a problem because plants help interrupt water flow enough to solve the problem. As the slope increases some type of stepped design works better. Each step is level, removing the slope issue.

The stepped approach is used on this home. There is an upper level which consists of a poured sidewalk around the whole house, leaving a flower bed on either side. The flower bed away from the house is dropped down a bit so that it is almost level.

A set of flat stones have been added next to the lower bed. This separates the garden from the grass and is a barrier between the bed and sidewalk. These stones are not a big problem along the grass if they are set level and at the right height. They then become a place for running the wheels of the lawnmower, reducing the need to edge the grass. Along the sidewalk they prevent soil and mulch from washing away. These stones are a bit above grade which will help keep people out of the flower bed.

Again we have the ugly armor stones. They are all about the same size, shape and color. They are more or less equally spaced along the bed and are the same distance from the edge of the bed. To me they look out of place and add very little to the garden. Don't get me wrong, I think



this would be a great place for stones, but they should vary in size and be mostly roundish, natural-looking stones. They should be grouped in a few spots or randomly spaced.

I suspect the planting is quite new and more plants will be added to the lower section, or at least I hope this is the case. The selected trees are good ones. They will

all stay small and some are weepers.

What about the semicircle of white rocks? Do you like it? Does it serve a purpose or is it an aesthetic feature? It does not seem to have a real purpose, so I consider it an aesthetic feature.

The question, do you like it, is an important one. If you like it – it is good design. Remember, in your own garden you are designing for yourself.

It does break up a very long flower bed making it more interesting and very unique. For that reason it has some value. But to be honest I don't really love it – but that is my personal taste – it is neither right nor wrong.

This house is a bit unusual in that the builder has added a significant side entrance. If you only saw one side of the house you would think it is a main entrance and a walkway could be placed leading right up to it. I think that would have looked better, but it might have confused people into thinking they should enter the house that way.

This is a case of deciding between function and aesthetics, what some people call form. Aesthetically, a pathway would look better but the design works better functionally by leaving it out. This is a very common problem you will find with most design decisions; a selection between form and function.

# Older Neighborhoods

Newer homes provide the designer a blank canvas to work with. That makes the job more daunting but you have more options. Older homes may seem to be easier to design, but they complicate things by the presence of existing garden elements. In this section I will look at some average sized homes in older neighborhoods.

## Home #9

I received the pictures for this home from a landscape architect friend, Paul Brydges, from Brydges Landscape Architecture Inc. The first two pictures are before pictures and the rest are after pictures.



This was a fairly small older home that had an addition added at some point (right side of the entry door). It has a huge driveway/entry pathway leading right up to the main door. The pathway is ugly and does nothing for the nice home and main entry way.

There are a couple of large spruce trees that are great looking but have outgrown their space. Now they hide the house and provide a lot of shade on the south side

of the house. Any landscape changes need to take these into account. The flower beds are ok but don't add much interest to the home.

That excavator sitting on the lawn is not their car – the picture must have been taken just before site demolition.



It is not hard to guess that Paul likes designing with stone. It is a great medium for any garden, but it can be expensive.

The following pictures show the home after design and implementation. The main steps have been replaced with larger ones, making the front entry way even more prominent and luxurious. A stone patio has been added in the front of the house. This type of design is common in Europe, but is very uncommon here in Canada.

The front gate and brickwork emphasize the entry way and keeps the patio private. The house is on a fairly quiet street so this would be a pleasant place to sit.

Have a look at the before and after entry pictures. The after is much more formal looking and there are several reasons for this. The pillars on each side of the front gate are symmetrical and symmetry is important for producing a formal look.



At the top of the steps you see two planters, more symmetry, containing tightly clipped evergreens. The fact that the plants have similar shaped and are trimmed into tight cones also adds to the formal feeling. To top it off, there are two lights on the front pillars, duplicating the symmetrical effect. Even the fixtures have a formal style.



This entry way also uses a common design trick. Look at the relative size of the lamps and the planters. Logic tells us that lights are smaller than planters containing trees. Our brain expects the planters to be bigger because our brain knows what they are. In reality, the planters are relatively small compared to the lights. Large lights were selected on purpose so that, from the street, they look almost as tall

as the planters. Our minds take this information, process it and conclude that the planters must be a long way back from the front gate. It is the way our brain rationalizes between what it sees and what it knows.

The relative size of the lights and planters make us think that the two items are far apart leading us to the conclusion that the patio is larger than it really is. This is a classic way of making small gardens look bigger. You can do the same by pruning trees close to the viewer larger than trees farther away, or making a pathway narrower as it recedes from the viewer.



One of the problems with a formal design is that it can feel cold. One solution to this is to de-formalize it. In this design they are using two techniques for this.

The first one is to add some curvature to the walls. Have a look at the last photo in the series. Instead of a rectangular patio, it has some curved sides. This softens the formal look and warms it up.

The plantings also help. Except for the two trees in the planters, the other plantings are informal. The main tree to the left of the patio could have been a closely clipped evergreen to

match the formal design, but instead they chose an informal deciduous tree. The hosta plantings in front are also informal.

I really like this design except for one thing. The wide cobble stone pathway leading to the gate seems out of place to me. The type of stone and the way it was laid just does not match the rest of the stonework. The pathway is also too wide – it seems to be out of scale with the patio. The space between the stones is quite large and will be a weed magnet, creating a maintenance nightmare.

## Home #10

This house is perfect for a formal front garden but the owners haven't put it in yet; so let's create it for them.

What makes this house formal? In one word, symmetry. The doorway is in the center of the house. There is exactly one window on each side of the doorway. The roof has two chimneys, one on each side. The walkway to the front door is straight with a clear path to the door, there is a large evergreen at each corner of the house and a planter on each side of the doorway.



The style of the brickwork is also formal. It has lots of intricate detail that you would expect in an older expensive home.

One rule of landscape design is to match the garden style to the style of the home. A cottage garden looks best with an English garden. A modern home looks best with a modern garden. And a formal home needs a formal garden. Normally, I think this rule can be broken but in this case, this home really would suit a formal garden.

What features make a garden formal? Symmetry is number one. Whatever you do on the left side of the walkway, you do on the right side. Random curves are out and rectangles and circles are in. Many formal gardens are edged with a low boxwood or yew hedge. Color schemes are subtle and repeated, as are patterns.

Since the ideal garden does not exist you will have to use your imagination while I describe it. Each side of the central pathway has a rectangular garden, surrounded by a low boxwood hedge. Right now the grassy area on the right side is larger than the left, but it will be important that the new gardens area exactly the same size. The extra space to the right will visually disappear as the garden develops.

The walkway to the house is cheap looking and not nearly wide enough – this house deserves better. A new stone walkway, that is as wide as the front step, will run from the sidewalk to the house. About 6 feet out from the house a narrower walkway, made of the same stone, will run perpendicular to the main walkway. This will create flower beds in front of the house and provide easy access from the driveway to the front door. On the right side, the pathway will either stop at the end of the garden or lead around the side of the house.

This creates two fairly large rectangular gardens. Each one will have an opening in the center of the hedge, at the end near the house. From the street it will look as if the gardens have no way to get in them adding some mystery to the place.

You can do lots of things inside each garden depending on your gardening interests. Add a round bed with roses or a round ornate fountain in the center of each bed. Or leave the grass in the center, and make rectangular beds around the outside. This would create a lot of space to grow perennials and add lots of color.

Provided you keep things symmetrical, and use round or rectangular shapes you will maintain that formal look. The basic bones of the garden are the pathways and hedges. They make everything linear and square.

I'd also like to point out one problem with formal gardens. It can be difficult to maintain symmetry with plants. Have a look at the two large trees on either side of the house. They are the same, but they are different. Over time their shape is changing and each one is starting to take on a different shape. This throws the whole symmetry thing out of whack and except for some pruning there is very little you can do about it. If one dies, it will be difficult to replace.

## Home #11

Here is an interesting house. Ignore the garden for now. What style of house is it? It looks like a cottage house, in part because of its small size. It is very symmetrical but it lacks the ornate features found in many formal homes. Sometimes the style can be what you think it is. In this case the owner has decided it is formal and they have started to make a formal garden.



Notice the low yew hedge - it screams formality. The stone work, trees and planters are all symmetrical. It even has a central straight pathway right up to the front door.

There are some taller yews on the left side, but not on the right. I suspect these are older plantings that will be removed as the garden is finished. They upset the symmetry being developed.

It looks as if the hellstrip is full of daylilies, a good plant for this area, but hardly a plant that supports the formal look.

Compare the brickwork here to that of home 9. The pillars are definitely shorter, which is more in scale with the size of this house. They may be a bit too wide for the space. For beginning designers it is very hard to know what the right scale is until it is built. Only then do you realise your mistake.

Talking about scale, do you see something else out of scale? Yes, the planters. They are far too small for the space. Bigger ones cost a lot more, but are worth it.

## Home # 12

I included this house because I liked the design of the side yard. This house is in a neighborhood



that has many old mature maples which provide lots of shade. Most of the gardens in the area are informal and it suits the house.

I like this meandering stone pathway going around the side of the house. Most people would have made it straight, but then it would not have such a natural feel to it. Notice how each curve has a clear purpose – they go around the corner of the

house and the addition in the back. When there is a clear reason for curves they look so much better.

The pathway is also wide enough for walking, but not too wide for the space. The selection of very large pieces of flagstone makes it a bit more formal looking than a bunch of smaller pieces. I think they add class to the garden.

The walkway makes good use of another design idea. See how it curves around the back of the blue building. It adds suspense to the journey by making us wonder what we will find at the end of the pathway.

This seems like a very obvious thing to do in a side yard – you need a way to get to the backyard. But you can also use this technique in any garden. A curved pathway that leads to an area that is not visible to the viewer not only adds intrigue to the journey, but it makes the whole garden seem much bigger than it is. The end of a pathway can be easily hidden by shrubbery or a trellis.

## Home #13

This larger house is located a few doors down from the previous one. It has great stonework on the house and a very minimal garden. The house is quite spectacular and it does not need a fancy garden to make the property look good.



The garden has clean lines which enhances the view of the house. The stones along the edge of the driveway direct the view to the house and serve the functional role of keeping the soil from washing onto the driveway.



Let's have a look at the bed on the left side of the house. It looks ok but I am not sure it does much for the home. The size of the bed is small compared to the size of the house.

The second issue is that the trees will soon be too big for the space. The two evergreens are very architectural plants and would look much better in their own separate beds, or with much more space between them in a large bed.

There is a design rule that says always plant in odd numbers. I don't actually follow that rule a lot and think the rule should be, don't plant in pairs. You can make 4 work in many cases, but two is a hard number to work with and in this case 2 is the wrong number.

I also think the trees should be at least 6 feet farther away from the house. This yard has plenty of space so there is no need to cram them up against the house.

# The ½ Design Idea

You are probably wondering, where is the ½ design idea?

To be honest there is no such thing as half an idea. There are half-baked ideas, but not half ideas. I added the ½ in the title to get your attention so that you would notice the book. I wanted you to say to yourself, ½ design idea – how unusual.

This is actually a very important design idea. Over the years I have come to realise that a big part of making a good garden special is to make the garden unusual. Add features that make people take a second look. You want to create your design so that others think it is special and therefore remember it. To do that you need to do something that none of your neighbors are doing. That is the ½ design idea – something out of the ordinary.



This is one of pieces of art in my garden that visitors see as they enter the side yard. It is unique and helps people remember my garden – the fish head with the eye.

# Next Steps

Let me ask you a simple question? Were you able to follow and understand my discussions? I hope your answer is yes.

This is important because it shows that you can learn how to design gardens better. Many people think landscape design is some mysterious complex process, which requires a high degree of creativity, but it's not. There is a fairly straight process for creating spectacular designs. It is a step by step process that anyone can learn, even if you can't draw or have no imagination.

I will let you in on a little secret. Some of my best design ideas are stolen. I fake my creativity by looking at existing gardens and taking ideas from them and make them my own. When I go on a garden tour I analyse the gardens just as I did in this book. I then stow away all of the good ideas until my next design project.

My blog [GardenFundamentals.com](http://GardenFundamentals.com) is a source of gardening information and in the past I have been focused on the how-to of gardening, such as how to start plants from seed, how to grow bulbs and how to take care of your soil. In future you can expect to see a lot more information about landscape design, so if this is something that interests you, make sure you stay on our mailing list.

## What can you do right now to improve your garden?

- ❖ Have a look at the following articles and see if some of the ideas can be used in your garden.
  - [10 Reasons for Adding Art to the Garden](#)
  - [Low Maintenance Garden Design – 10 Mistakes to Avoid](#)
- ❖ Subscribe to [GardenFundamentals.com](http://GardenFundamentals.com) so that you don't miss any new design articles.
- ❖ Take a walk around different neighborhoods. Analyze each garden. At first this will be difficult but as you do more of them, it becomes easier. To make the process easier pick

a specific topic that interests you and focus on it. Say that you want to redo the steps leading to your front door. Go through the neighborhood and see which step design you like and don't like. A big part of designing is to understand your own wants and needs. If you see one you like, ask yourself, why do I like it? Understanding the *why* will help you design your own front entry way.

- ❖ Start your design portfolio. This is a collection of pictures showing gardens you like. The pictures don't need to be complete gardens. If you like a certain statue, a gate, or a plant, add a picture of it to your design folder. Get pictures off the internet and add those as well. When it comes time to do some design, you have this great resource from which you can "steal" ideas.
- ❖ Keep reading Garden Fundamentals News, our monthly newsletter. It will contain more landscape design articles.
- ❖ Join our [Garden Fundamentals Facebook Group](#). It is a great place to ask me questions about both design and how to take care of your garden and plants.
- ❖ Take the time to sit and analyse your own garden. Make a list of what you like and don't like about it. Be specific. There is not much value in saying, "it's not exciting". Try to figure out why it is not exciting and be as specific as you can. If you can't find an answer, ask a different question like, what is it about the garden down the street that makes it exciting? Again, be specific.

The journey to creating a great garden is not a simple one and it does not happen overnight. It is a process that requires work. The good news is that this work can be fun – at least for people who love gardens. Keep having fun.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R Pavlis".

# About Me

I live in Southern Ontario, Canada, with a US zone 5 climate and have been gardening for more than 30 years – I stopped counting at 30! I am a Master Gardener and speak about gardening at many local gardening events and horticulture meetings. I contribute the ‘Plant of the Month’ articles for the Ontario Rock Garden & Hardy Plant Society, write articles for some local newspapers and teach several courses at the local university.



A few years ago, I bought 6 acres of land and have been developing a large private garden called [Aspen Grove Gardens](#). We now have about 3,000 perennials, grasses, shrubs and trees.

I am a plantaholic!

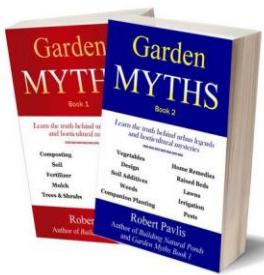
I have a background in chemistry and biochemistry and it is this background that helps me research topics and understand the underlying science behind things. Once I understand the topic it is then my task to present the information in an easy to understand style that is both informative and fun to read.

## **My gardening philosophy:**

- ❖ Understand the ‘why’ in everything you do.
- ❖ Look to nature for answers – mother nature already knows how to garden.
- ❖ KISS in the garden; KISS = keep it simple stupid.
- ❖ Bugs and diseases are part of life – learn to live with it.
- ❖ Organic gardening works – too bad ‘organic fanatics’ mislead the public.
- ❖ Have fun – or stop doing it.

# My Books

## Garden Myths, Book 1 & 2



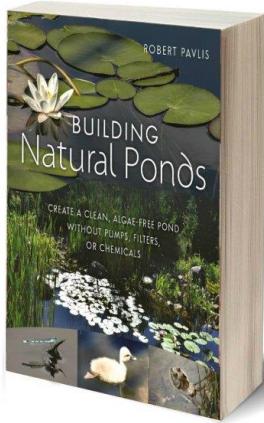
Each *Garden Myths* examines over 120 horticultural urban legends. Turning wisdom on its head, Robert Pavlis dives deep into traditional garden advice and debunks the myths and misconceptions that abound. He asks critical questions and uses science-based information to understand plants and their environment. Armed with the truth, Robert then turns this knowledge into easy-to-follow advice.

- Is fall the best time to clean the garden?
- Do bloom boosters work?
- Will citronella plants reduce mosquitoes in the garden?
- Do pine needles acidify soil?
- Should tomatoes be suckered?
- Should trees be staked at planting time?
- Can burlap keep your trees warm in winter?
- Will pebble tray increase humidity for houseplants?

**[CLICK HERE - FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS BOOK](#)**

## Building Natural Ponds

Typical backyard ponds are a complicated mess of pipes, pumps, filters, and nasty chemicals designed to adjust pH and keep algae at bay. Hardly the bucolic, natural ecosystem beloved by dragonflies, frogs, and songbirds.



The antidote is a natural pond, free of hassle, cost, and complexity and designed as a fully functional ecosystem, ideal for biodiversity, swimming, irrigation, and quiet contemplation.

*[Building Natural Ponds](#)* is the first step-by-step guide to designing and building natural ponds that use no pumps, filters, chemicals, or electricity and mimic native ponds in both aesthetics and functionality. Highly illustrated with how-to drawings and photographs, coverage includes:

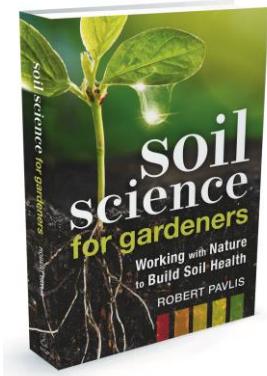
- Understanding pond ecosystems and natural algae control
- Planning, design, siting, and pond aesthetics
- Step-by-step guidance for construction, plants and fish, and maintenance and trouble shooting
- Scaling up to large ponds, pools, bogs, and rain gardens.

Whether you're a backyard gardener looking to add a small serene natural water feature or a homesteader with visions of a large pond for fish, swimming, and irrigation, *[Building Natural Ponds](#)* is the complete guide to building ponds in tune with nature, where plants, insects, and amphibians thrive in blissful serenity.

**[CLICK HERE - FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS BOOK](#)**

## Soil Science for Gardeners

**Build healthy soil and grow better plants.** Healthy soil means thriving plants. Yet untangling the soil food web and optimizing your soil health is beyond most gardeners, many of whom lack an in-depth knowledge of the soil ecosystem.



*[Soil Science for Gardeners](#)* is an accessible, science-based guide to understanding soil fertility and, in particular, the rhizosphere – the thin layer of liquid and soil surrounding plant roots, so vital to plant health.

Robert Pavlis, a gardener for over four decades, debunks common soil myths, explores the rhizosphere, and provides a personalized soil fertility improvement program in this three-part popular science guidebook.

Coverage includes:

- Soil biology and chemistry and how plants and soil interact
- Common soil health problems, including analyzing soil's fertility and plant nutrients
- The creation of a personalized plan for improving your soil fertility, including setting priorities and goals in a cost-effective, realistic time frame.
- Creating the optimal conditions for nature to do the heavy lifting of building soil fertility

Written for the home gardener, market gardener, and micro-farmer, *[Soil Science for Gardeners](#)* is packed with information to help you grow thriving plants.

**[CLICK HERE - FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS BOOK](#)**

# References

The best way to connect with me is to join our Facebook Group.

[Garden Fundamentals Facebook Group](#)

My YouTube Channel

[Garden Fundamentals YouTube Channel](#)

My Blogs

[Garden Fundamentals](#)

[Garden Myths](#)