

## What's Coming Up:

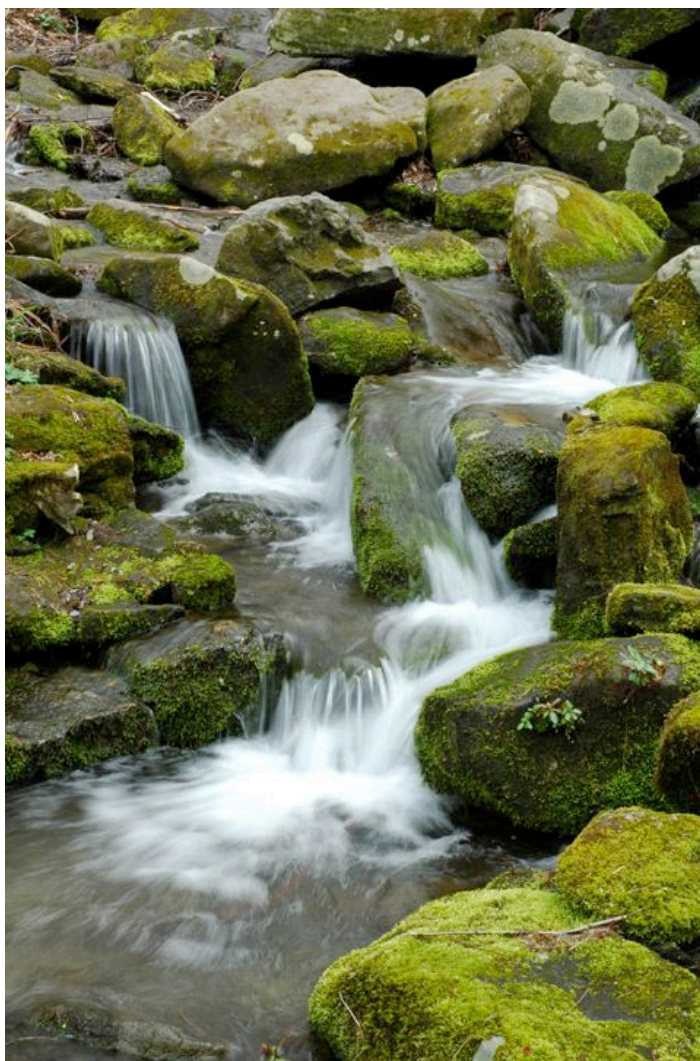
Janet Macunovich answers  
your growing concerns  
Issue 75, January 9, 2010

### Here you'll find:

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Before you build the rock wall, plant the new star or plumb the waterfall, decide where its most important viewer will be. That determines how big it must be and where to "aim" the display for best effect. If you don't aim the design, nothing you do later with plants or fuss can make up for it. Read more on pages 1-8.

Photo ©2010 Steven Nikkila  
See page 14 to have this or any other of  
Steven's beautiful images on your wall.



## Make the most of winter rest, when beds offer space, snow levels the field

Hello Janet,

I am writing to ask for some help with my front yard garden. I have resided at the same address for almost ten years and have expanded the backyard gardens without any problem. The front yard, however, has been a challenge from day one.

There are four mature maple trees in the front yard, two on each side of the huge U-shaped driveway. The trees are not the problem, it's the area inside the U of the driveway. It is a rather large area (approx. 35' x 50') and over the years I have considered different ways to use it, putting my thoughts on paper and laying out entire planting designs.

I have your book on design (*Designing Your Gardens and Landscape*) and have read it and reread it. Yet it seems that whatever I come up with, I'm disappointed with how it actually looks. My thought is to have a rock garden/cottage garden combo, keeping the existing two yews and small apple trees and adding additional plants and maybe a small water feature and/or vertical structure of some kind.



There are many, many plants in the backyard gardens to divide and use as plantings in the front yard. My husband has a 10 acre parcel in Manchester, MI from which hundreds of boulders have been harvested. This is very nice, but when we put them all in the garden 'design' it looks pretty sad to say the least. The whole design seems to have gotten lost in all the rocks.

(At right, the area of concern as seen from front door.)

I am very conscious of the tiny house and huge driveway and want to do something that adds 'curb appeal' yet not overdo it. I ask for your expertise and candor to advise where I went wrong and what I could do to make it more appealing and natural looking.



Photos ©2010 JJ Gallagher



(Left: The area as it looks from the hedge along the street; below, seen from the east arm of the "U" driveway.) Gallagher reports: "my husband just lined the rocks up...it looks dumb, I know, but I don't plan to leave them that way. The grassy area between the two 'mounds' will eventually be gone, replaced by plant material or something.....at least that's the plan. The intent is to have a couple truck loads of dirt brought in for that area, but before I do that I want to have a final plan. I also left an area around the garden perimeter that I call a mow strip. It also serves as an area to throw snow in the winter."



Other info:

exposure = north, prevailing winds

light = mostly shady due to all the trees,  
some east sun in a.m., some west sun in  
late p.m.

soil = right now sand (virgin soil taken from  
underneath a 40-year-old home), but  
plan to add compost and other  
amendments

I sincerely appreciate any help you extend. - J.J. -

You're not alone in having "designer's block" at this point, J.J. Front yards are tough. However, if you take the suggestions I make here and then go back to my book, you can break through.

It seems like you're caught up now on what you'll use in the design (the yews, apple trees, rocks, etc.) Yet designing would be simpler if you first figure just what you want the space to do for you and which spot within the area is best as a focus and starting point for design detail.

"Curb appeal" is the goal you cite in your email, but that's too general to drive a design and test its success. These sketches and notes should help you to flesh out that objective. Perhaps your goal will become, "Give people a pretty view and the desire to come see what's beyond." It might also evolve to, "Look sharp all year and focus attention on the front door" or even "Make the house seem larger, encourage questions and add visual interest in winter and fall." I think you'll break through after you read these pages and review chapters 1-6 of my step-by-step book, *Designing Your Gardens and Landscape*.

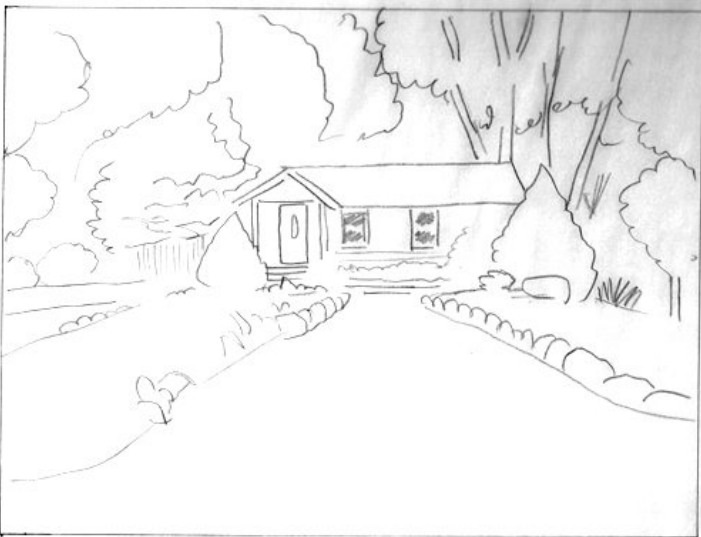
Winter's the perfect time to look at landscapes. Nature gives us a cleaner visual slate in winter, making it simpler to employ the technique I recommend to begin a design. That is, to ignore all variables and boil a scene down to its bones -- those things we can't change. If you live in a snowy region, you can even *draw your ideas right on the ground*!

Photo ©2010 Steven Nikkila



To begin: Print out a photo and find a piece of tracing paper or tissue paper. Trace only main lines, ignoring details. That masks distractions just as snow does. Pay no heed to specific seasonal color in a scene or individual players. Those are details which can stymie us if we have to take them into account now. They can cause us to think, "Oh! I can't move that peony!" When you draw only the strong lines and shapes you capture what speaks to us every day of the year at basic, unconscious and compelling levels. Such sketches can be very rough -- you'll see mine are! -- yet show all you need. Below, my tracings of your straight-on view.

Photo ©2010 by JJ Gallagher



From a winter armchair you can also instantly "complete" and then see beyond tough but necessary chores such as removing a lot of sod, moving a tree to a holding area, etc.



When I strip this scene to its bones, I don't see your house as too tiny for its setting; rather it's tucked into the "woods". As such it seems to call out for a bit of space of its own, some openness that can set it apart from the greenery around. It'll help, too, to remove those straight lines of rock. They stretch the foreground to look even deeper than it is.

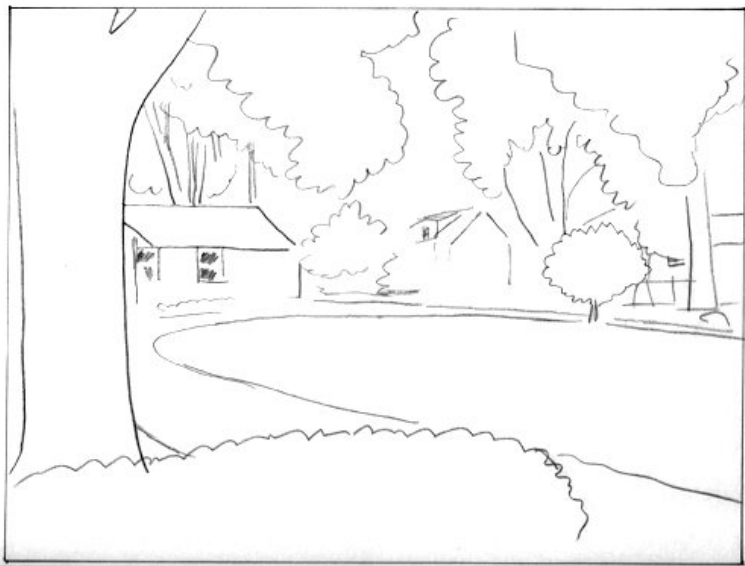




This whimsical mural in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the town of Trenary creates the same visual effect as "foundation" plantings. Avoid this flattened look in your landscape -- do not plant anything so close to your home that the space between it and the building is not apparent to the main viewer. That means the taller the item, the farther it must be from a building to preserve some visual separation in the eyes of the distant viewer. Photo ©2010 Steven Nikkila



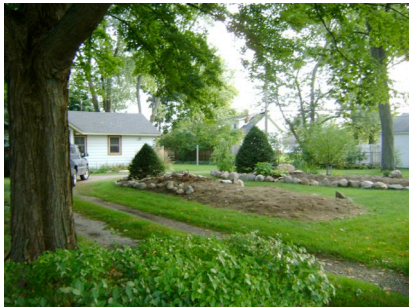
In your yard I see that the area you've been working on is closer to the house than the hedge. Consider whether the space near your hedge deserves more attention and whether most of the central area near the house could be populated with short elements. It will help to visualize this if you leave existing close, tall things out of the picture. That's simple to do -- just don't trace them. Picture pushing all the height in the interior of the "U" of your driveway into the foreground of the



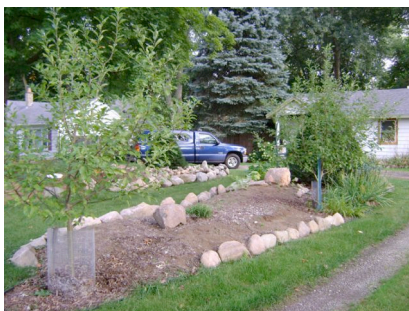
sketch at left and to the far right in the sketch above. What's near the hedge, especially taller items, would be seen by the main viewer without appearing to be "on" the house -- the eye would still perceive separation between the plantings and your home.

To address another, important design basic: It's very difficult to proceed with a design without electing a main viewer. At the get-go, decide if you'll design for the person looking from the front door toward the road (photo and sketches at right), or for the person pulling into the driveway (photos and sketches below, left and at the bottom of this page). Generally, and in this case, I give the approaching guest priority as a viewer over someone already at the front door.

Photos ©2010 JJ Gallagher

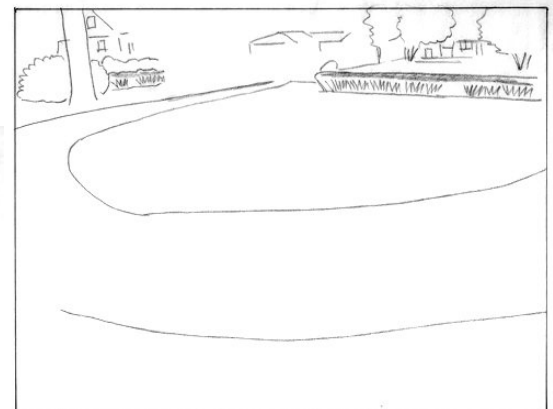
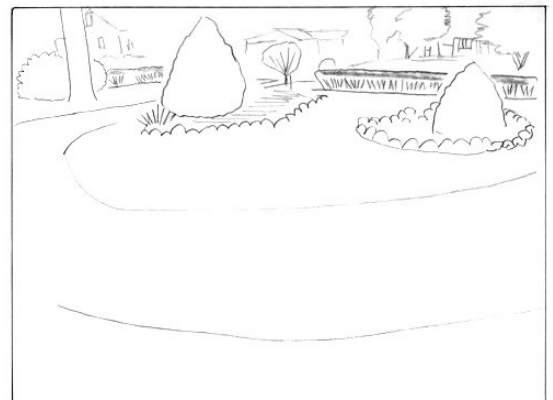
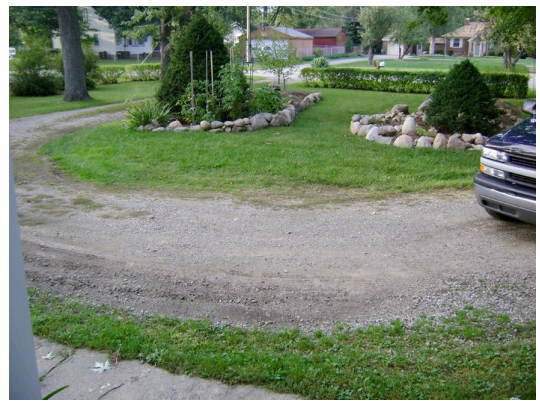


Consider potential as well as existing view. Tracings can eliminate current plantings and distractions. That's helpful in imagining the potential view.



When the potential is much greater from one angle than from others, you can make it a design objective to urge people to that favored spot. I think that's the case here. A visitor coming up the east side of your driveway will look across the central area toward two neighboring buildings (left, above) while someone coming up the west side will see a less cluttered, more pleasing backdrop of spruce and the front door (left, below).

Urging people to this chosen viewpoint may mean placing a "One Way" or "Entrance" sign at the west end of the U-driveway.

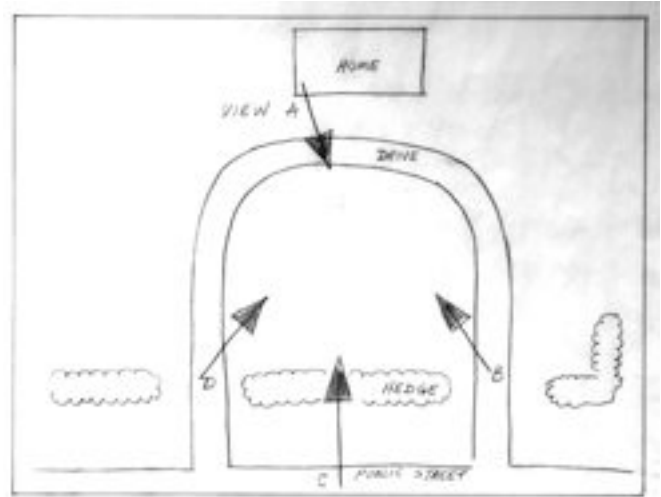
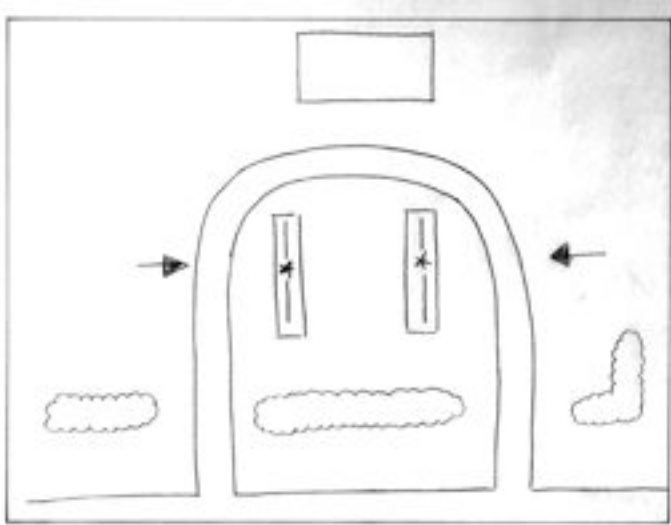


A designer can and will adjust the plan to please secondary viewers, but not until all is made right for the main viewer. Here, as I am designing to please the guest coming in from the west (sketch at left) it's possible to contrive plantings or a screen that will hide his/her view of the front door. That viewer will have to pass the final bend in the driveway before s/he will see the entrance. "Behind" that screen, for the viewer looking out the front door (sketch above), I can place something pleasant to see.

I don't have the dimensions of your yard, J.J., or locations of house, trees, driveway, but these rough diagrams will tell you how I thought about possible viewers and selected one as primary.

You took your photos from the arrowed locations, I think. (Right.)

However, the existing lines and beds in your area of concern, along with enduring elements such as the rocks, are laid out to address viewers at the points indicated by arrows, below.

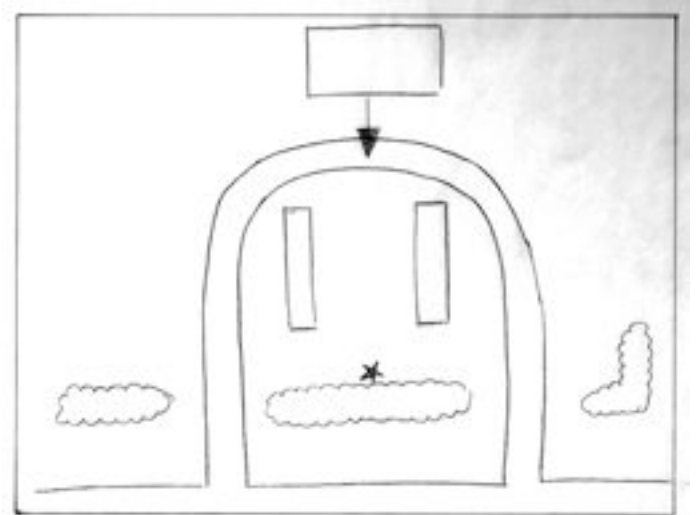


I'm glad you say you'll remove the lawn between the current beds, and that the rocks won't stay in those lines. Those bed edges, reinforced by rocky traces, guide the front door viewer's eye to the center of the hedge... and there is nothing distinctive along that path to reward those eyes. (Below.) Lines like these are universal, lead the eye through scenes both humble and grand -- around the Taj Mahal as well as at our humble homes.

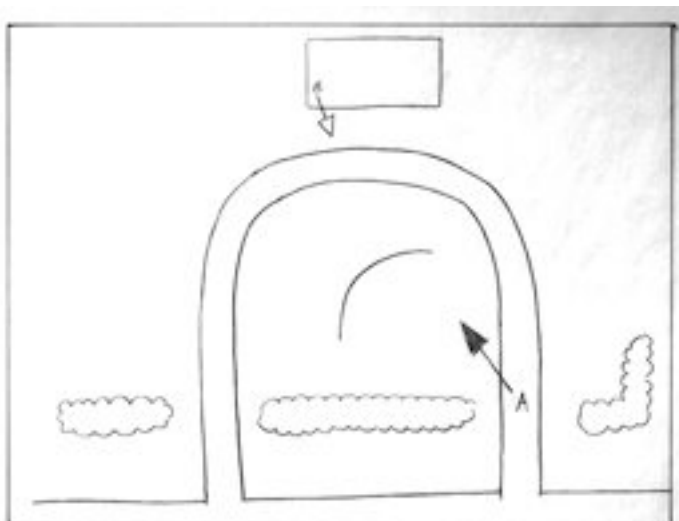


*An aside: In the photo you took from your front door -- at left, and on page 4 -- I see your hedge is in poor health, so it isn't the asset it could be. Even if we dislike lawn care and shrub maintenance they're important. Turf- and hedge condition can make or break even the very best garden.*

*I'd treat that hedge to a lawn-free surround, prune it to thin the top after it's sheared, give it more water, apply slow release fertilizer, and re-assess it after a year or so.*



Here (left) is a better placement for a main feature to engage the guest coming in from the driveway's west end. The current lines bisect the U of the driveway but only cross viewer A's plane of vision at one point and then fade off at an unfavorable angle. This arc I've drawn is better, intercepting that view like a page held square in front of the eyes. I like arcs to intercept a main viewer's gaze. It seemed doubly appropriate here, where the overall pattern is also an arc.

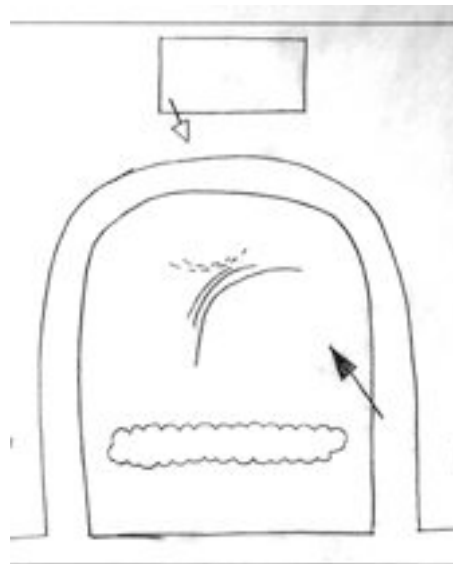
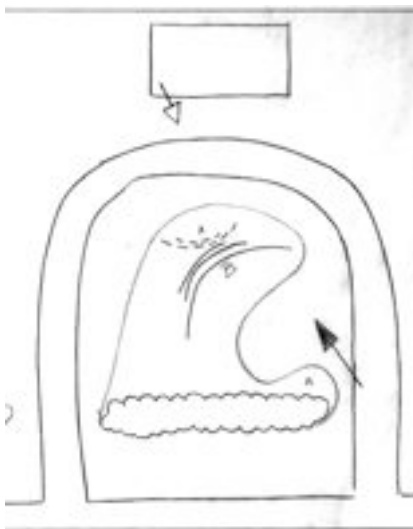




To relieve the flatness of the scene, we might plan a greater height or depth for this focal point we're establishing. Below, right, I add lines to give the arc more depth. They'll cue me throughout the design process to give this feature that extra dimension.

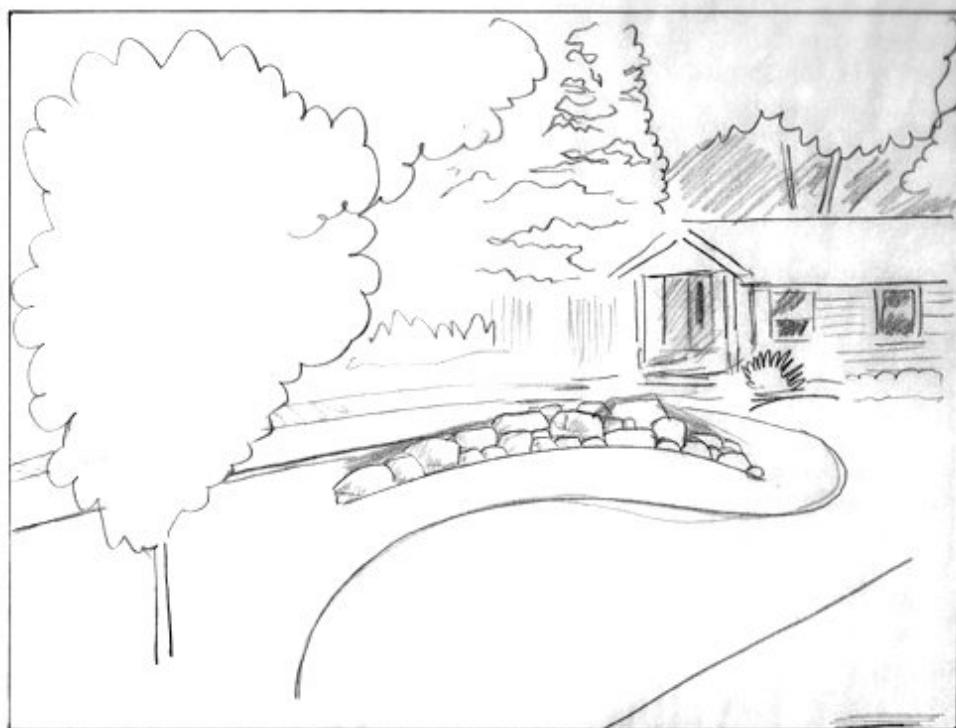
Notice that this arc (the solid lines) would also be square across the secondary (front door) viewer's field of vision. So its "back side" has potential to be developed for that viewer's pleasure later in the design process. It's even feasible to create another arc (the dashed-lines, at right) which would in its turn embrace the person at front door. Since there is less distance between this arc and that secondary viewer than between the first and our the main viewer, the "back side" focal point does not have to be as large.

With rare exception, I wait until the end of the design process to draw lines that outline beds (step 11, chapter 11 of my book). But below, left, I jump ahead to show you how the bed edge might work out. It arcs, visually reinforcing to the focal point arc. It also encompasses the hedge and may bow out at the west end of the hedge to accommodate some feature meant to be seen by the secondary viewer -- but only if we decide between now and then that the arc'd focal point will feature elements short enough to leave that site line open.



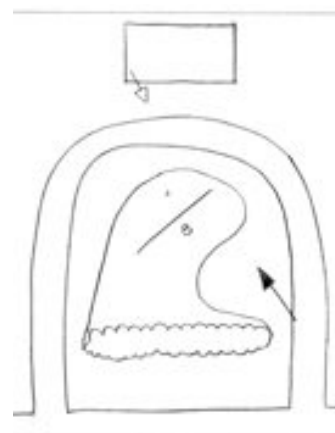
Please note that so far I have not been concerned with what type of plant or feature will create the arc. Because we observed the site (your notes, J.J., re: exposure, light, etc.) and made a plant and feature list (in steps four and five, chapters four and five of my book), I know we'll have materials to choose from in steps eight and nine, "place a focal point plant or feature" and "frame the focal point."

Then, since rocks are on the list (I love rock, too!) I can imagine a low boulder wall forming the arc and framed by a sweeping bed edge. (In their current positions, on

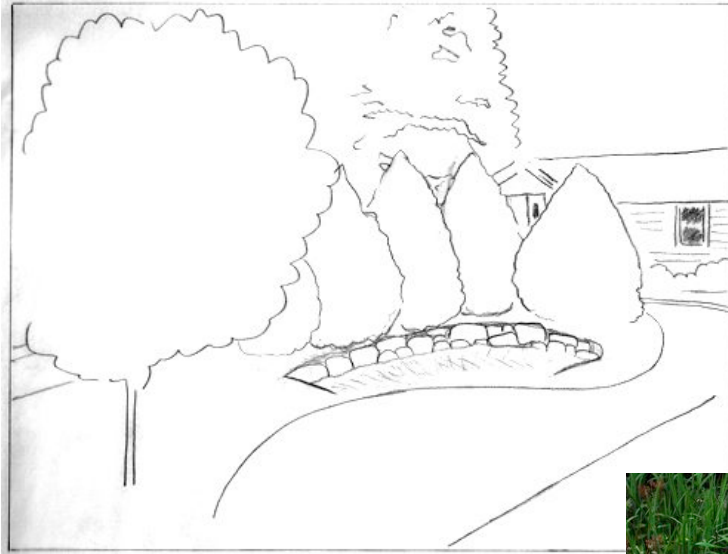


reason the boulders don't work well is that they create a frame that's heavier and more commanding of attention than what's inside the bed. Thus they appear to frame empty space.)

Do you prefer straight lines to curves? Either one could work here. A single straight line element could also serve both viewers.



It's also worth thinking about dividing this space to make "rooms" within your front yard. By constructing the focal point line with taller features of year-round solidity, you can "hide" the house from the main viewer while give the secondary viewer a feeling of privacy. That line might begin at the southwest existing yew. (I have simply ignored even the yews and apple trees so far, along with all other variables.) If you like both boulder and hedge ideas, you might make the hedge and retrace its line with a rock retaining wall at the deep end of a sunken rock garden sloping up toward the primary viewer.



All of this describes only one possibility of many for this space. We could move the focal point closer to the hedge (down and to the left in this sketch), so less room will be devoted to pleasing the incoming main viewer. The private back side of the focal point element, now farther away from the secondary viewer at the front door, could be given more space. If in moving toward the hedge we also move into sunnier space, all the better since our plant choices will be less restricted.

Alternatively, we can consider replacing the hedge. A less straight, less homogenous border may be more appealing to you.

Right: Here's a bed where I lowered the grade to construct a wall that would add winter interest.

Although no design is absolutely "right", if you let go of variables during winter when you can doodle and dream on an empty slate, the bones may take such firm shape that all later design decisions are a snap

Below: I've worked a long time on the rock retaining wall and path across the hill, below, and won't choose or place permanent plants until I'm happy with the bare stones. That's because even when a plant is beautiful against rock it can't change inherent awkwardness in the line or composition of the stones.



Photos ©2010 Steven Nikkila



I hope you have fun designing, J.J. With a specific aim, a main viewer, a focal point location and outline firm in mind, you can examine and decide the disposition of all you have placed and done so far. Some existing elements, like the one yew, may fall neatly into a position. Others may need to be put into a holding bed. You'll be able to schedule a logical, productive flow for spring.



## Re-doing a landscape? Join me January 23, January 30 and/or February 6

I like to help people learn more about design -- to draw your own or simply learn enough to be sure the designer you hire fulfills your need. In a three-part seminar in Detroit, for instance:

- I lead the first session, emphasizing critical first steps in design, prior to plant selection.
- Cheryl Bennerup presents and I moderate the second session, looking at plants for the design.
- Steven Nikkila and I wrap-up by showing and explaining our favorite before-after situations.

Sign up for one or all three. Read more about my classes on page #.



Many species that contributed to modern *Kalanchoe* hybrids hark from Madagascar, where freezes are rare to nonexistent. However, some from highland areas evolved with relative drought during winter (less than an inch of rain per week, down from the rainy season's 10) along with rather precipitous daily drops in temperature. Falling from 77°F by day to 50°F after sunset is average but as recently as 2007, 32°F was recorded. It could be that these species "learned" dry and cold followed by warmer and wetter means "It's spring - bloom now!" Photo ©2010 Steven Nikkila

### Big mistake, big lesson: *Kalanchoe* goes from cool to cold, and into bloom!

I brought two plants home from the office for the holidays since they announced that they'd be turning down the thermostat to 58 degrees. One was a beautiful compact variegated pothos... and the other was a kalanchoe (I've had for years and) recently trimmed to a shadow of its former self. Well, I'm such an idiot that I left them overnight in the car. The pothos utterly collapsed, went limp and is dying a slow and painful death. The kalanchoe responded to a freezing night by blooming almost as soon as it came indoors. It looks healthy enough to be a wax plant. I'm thinking of keeping it in the refrigerator from now on. - Beaufort Cranford -

Too bad about the pothos, Beaufort. That tropical Asian species isn't equipped for cold. But what a cool thing to know about *Kalanchoe*!

**Kalanchoe: We don't know ye!** Or: Don't argue pronunciation of plant names!

When scientists agreed base plant names on Greek and Latin, they were clarifying the written names, not the pronunciation. Even sticklers for language admit there is a classic way to pronounce Latin, an English pronunciation, and so on. So even top-notch horticulturists reading aloud from a list of properly spelled plant names often say words differently.

In addition, many plant names contain "Latinized" modern terms. A golden-age Greek or Roman might not even attempt to sound out the second name of the lily dubbed *Lilium Michiganense*.

When a plant's scientific name is adopted as its common name, the plot thickens. Take *Kalanchoe*. It's accepted as kal-an-KOH-ee among scientists. Yet those letters look to English speakers to be kal-EN-choh, which is so commonly heard that Webster's dictionary now allows kal-EN-choh as a secondary pronunciation.

## Amaryllis and Janet both known to invoke "no repeat" clause

Dear readers,

I wrote my first weekly Q&A article in 1993, glad to be able to help you as well as have reason to research, interview and experiment in search of answers.

After 18 years of succeeding on both counts I remain just as determined to get as much as I give. That means continually pursuing new information. So when questions come in that I have already featured and for which I have no new or better explanations, I reply by private email, letter or phone call rather than repeat anything here.

Often, those replies are "reprints" from within six collections of Q&A columns I've already published (currently "in print" as my CD "Asking About Asters").

This week, such questions prompted me to dip into my April 16, 1994 article, now part of the collection *Asking About Asters*:

**"Last year, a gift amaryllis was elegant in its full bloom. I followed the directions... hoping for a repeat of last year's show... the plant did not flower. I cut the leaves back hoping to force the bloom but still no flower..."**

"...Cutting the leaves back won't help, and may give it a reason to not bloom next year... If you want to give it a chance anyway, keep it in good light, water it well, fertilize it weekly, put it in the garden again, and stop watering it late in August so that its leaves begin to go yellow on their own before you bring it in next fall. Put it in a cool place -- no cooler than 45° -- out of the sun and let it rest 6-8 weeks. Don't start watering it or bring it into warmth and sun until it sends up a bit of green. Then cross your fingers and hope you've been a proper attendant to this queen of plants."

I did everything you said and everything I read.  
Some of my amaryllis bulbs did bloom again. Some never did.  
All of them got smaller and smaller over the years.  
This Christmas I started over with new bulbs from the store!  
- Betty Grady -

## Wrapping-up my Grins and Grow-ans feature

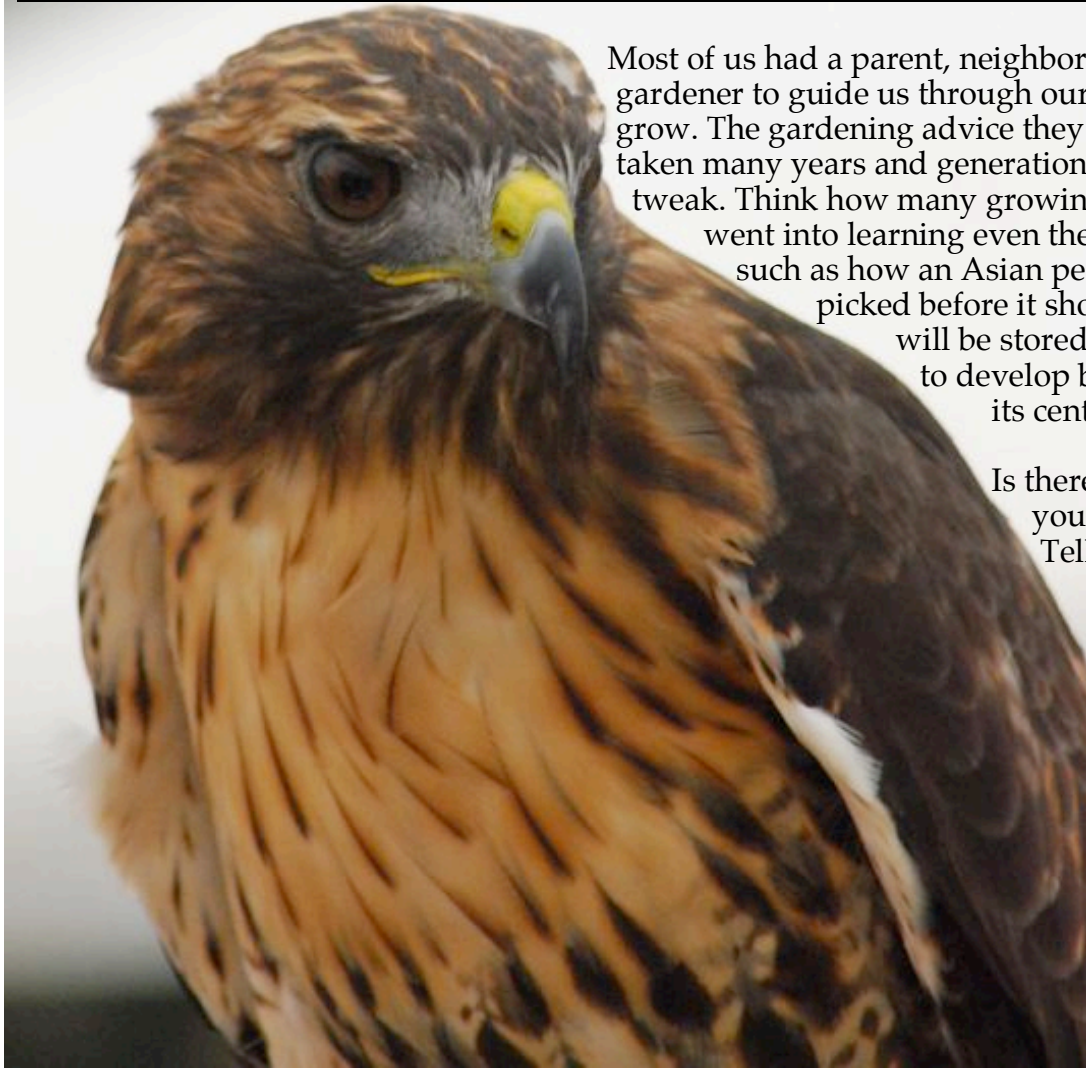
It's been fun, but you tell me my old ways were better.  
So, returning next issue to fill this spot:

**Green thumbs up  
and  
Green thumbs down**

Thanks for asking after this old favorite!



## Alone in the Garden? Never! Our mentors are always with us:



Most of us had a parent, neighbor or other veteran gardener to guide us through our first attempts to grow. The gardening advice they gave us may have taken many years and generations to confirm and tweak. Think how many growing seasons and trials went into learning even the simplest things, such as how an Asian pear's fruit should be picked before it shows any yellow, if it will be stored. It's then less likely to develop brown spots in its center.

Is there such wisdom in your keeping now?  
Tell me about it. I'll pass it along.

This came from an engineer who was an inveterate student with a deep love for the natural world. He asked questions and looked into the answers he got, from the time he was a tiny tyke on a "hard scrabble farm in Kentucky:"

When you shock your corn in fall (that's when you bunch and tie the ear-bearing stalks to stand in dry cold-storage in the field), leave enough room between shocks for a hawk or owl to go through with spread wings. Then, the birds can save your crop by keeping corn-fed rodents from multiplying in the shelter of the shocks.

## This week in Janet's garden

### Grow with me! This week I will:

Look for information that might save some of these oddball plants we've taken in. Ever overwintered yellow butterfly vine (*Mascagnia macroptera*)? I've been asked, and found some written accounts but would love to hear from someone who's had first hand experience. Email me if that's you!

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Buckle down and finish the index of 2009's newsletters so we can make better use of them. I'll make that available to you as soon as I can.

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Finish working through the feedback you gave me regarding this newsletter's format, colors and content. Thank you for all that! I'll use it to develop a new look.

## Who's Janet?

**The gardener's trainer.** For over twenty years Janet Macunovich has been helping gardeners grow through her classes, books and other publications. She shares what she learns in attending classes herself at educational institutions all over the country, reading, participating in professional symposia, and applying it all in her own and client's gardens. To learn more, email JMaxGarden@aol.com and ask for What's Coming Up, Issue #1. Email questions to her at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

## Where to catch Janet and friends in-person:

**Tuesday, January 12, 2010, 7:00 p.m.. *Choosing the Best of New Plants.*** Join Janet at the **Association of Professional Gardeners meeting** at Warren Mott High School in Warren, Michigan -- 3131 Twelve Mile Road, Room 321. The meeting is open to members. Other gardeners, professional or otherwise, are welcome for this meeting. More details at [www.associationofprofessionalgardeners.org](http://www.associationofprofessionalgardeners.org)

**Thursday, January 14, 7:00 p.m. "Saving Time and Money in the Garden."** Economize with Janet at **Cromaine District Library, Hartland, Michigan**. Free. Reserve a seat: 810-632-5200.

**Registration is closed for: Wednesdays, January 20, January 27 and February 3, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Do it! Easy, beautiful landscape design,** a three-part series at the Chesterfield township library. Janet provides directions for creating the landscape of your dreams, one with four seasons of interest, that increases your home's value and decreases your yardwork.

**Saturdays, January 23, January 30 and February 6, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. "Garden Design, New Plants, and Janet & Steve's 50 Favorite Before-Afters."** These sessions featuring Janet Macunovich, Steven Nikkila and Cheryl Bennerup (more about Cheryl on page 13) are sponsored by The Detroit Garden Center as part of its 19th annual winter seminar series and also feature great company, coffee and refreshments. Classes are held in the auditorium at Historic Trinity Church, 1345 Gratiot in Detroit. Parking is in a fenced, guarded lot. This is a stone's throw from the always-bustling Detroit Eastern Market where you can go for a pleasant lunch and continued discussion after the meeting. Register by calling The Detroit Garden Center at 313-259-6363, emailing [detroitgardencentr@yahoo.com](mailto:detroitgardencentr@yahoo.com) or printing the mail-in registration form at [www.detroitgardencenter.org](http://www.detroitgardencenter.org).

**Sunday, February 7, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. Janet & Steven's annual Tool Cleaning party.** Bring your tools and learn how to clean and sharpen them. Then set a spell and do just that. Bring a snack to share -- all that honing and oiling burns the calories. We're co-hosting this year with our professional gardener, arborist buddy **Deb Hall** in Milford, Michigan. Free. Space is limited. Email JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850 to reserve a spot and receive location.



## Invite Janet or Steven or their expert friends to your club or community.

We go where we're invited! That's taken us all over the country and then some over the past 20 years. We address many topics, drawing from our list of **100+ talks**. We also continue **to meet groups' needs** and expand our horizons by developing new material or "hybridizing" from what we already have.

So, whether it's...

- a **how-to lesson for a garden club** meeting,
- a **hands-on workshop** at a site of your choosing or
- a **multi-part class** for a small group,

...we're game!

We can also connect you to one or a whole line-up of other experts who know how to explain how-to. So give us a **call or send an email** to make a date, request our list of classes and talks or get a referral. **JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850**. Our calendars fill about a year in advance for spring weekends, and six months ahead for most other weekends and evenings. So give us some lead time. Then we can meet you in *your* garden.

Steven Nikkila and Janet Macunovich have been digging, shooting and teaching how-to for 22 years. They began producing conferences in the early '90s and then ran a gardening school for 12 years, featuring instructors who knew their stuff in the garden as well as knowing how to get their messages across in front of a group. That line-up includes people like Cheryl Bennerup, who joins Janet and Steven for the January 30 session described on page 12. Cheryl and Janet began their relationship 20 years ago when Cheryl grew perennials for Janet's business at her Milford, Michigan greenhouse. It continues today as Janet taps into Cheryl's know-how as chief of propagation and troubleshooting for one of the country's largest perennial growers, Sunny Border Nursery in Connecticut. Janet and Steve are glad to help you themselves or refer you to others like Cheryl to meet your group's need. Contact them at JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850 when you want to set up a talk, workshop or class.

## A complete library of Janet's gardening how-to on one CD... just \$24.

Is this *What's Coming Up* newsletter useful to you? Imagine how a whole year of these weekly newsletters could help your garden grow.

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To get a copy of my CD, send a check payable to Janet Macunovich, to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328-3041. Include your name and full mailing address.



My CD has everything from 6 of my books: Soil prep, design, choose and de-bug plants, plus one A-Z index!

## Time to garden your walls!

Steven's decorated our walls with beautiful images from gardens and Nature. He can help you do the same.

Any of Steven's images, such as those in *What's Coming Up* can be made to hang on your wall. Email us at JMaxGarden@aol.com for details and to place an order.

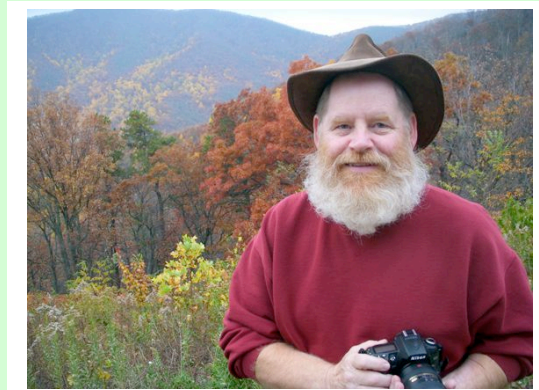
Prices depend on your choices in format and size.

For example:

Framed, matted, image 8" x 10", frame 11" x 14-1/2", \$48

Cloth tapestry\*, 3' x 4' (photo-quality print, museum-grade cloth) \$215

\*My favorite; I can change our display by simply rolling up one and unrolling another.



Sometimes it's the big picture that works best on the wall, sometimes it's a detail. Steven loves working with people to design the garden they place on their walls. *Pulmonaria longifolia* in a rock wall.

Photo ©2010 Steven Nikkila