

EXPERTS

LANDSCAPING 101

Award-Winning Designer **MARGIE GRACE** on How to Redo Your Yard

BY **MATT KETTMANN**

After 18 years working in the landscape design business, Margie Grace got her contractor's license and hung her own shingle in 2000. Today, Grace Design Associates works on about 20 projects each year and was recently named International Designer of the Year by the Association of Professional Landscape Designers, an award she also won a decade ago. She recently answered some basic questions about landscaping and shared her thoughts on current trends.

STEPS TO REDO YOUR YARD

(1) **Research:** Find/take photos of gardens you love, online, in magazines, around your neighborhood. Don't focus on plants or other details yet — you're looking for a feeling; it pulls you, inspires you; it's joyful. Do as little or as much of this as you're inclined to do. Do not stress over this. It's supposed to be fun.

(2) **Homework:** Think of the following:
Functions: Make a list of how you'd like to use the space — outdoor cooking, a place to play, animals, entertaining, chill-axing, etc.
Fantasies: Write down your wish list: everything you ever wanted in your dream garden.

Finances: Figure out your budget.
 (3) **Build your team:** Find a great designer. Meet them on-site. Bring your homework and photos from your research. See if you have a good rapport and a shared vision of your project and you like his/her aesthetic. Then hire them, and trust them to guide you to your best garden.

(4) **Find a design that fits your needs:** This is where your research and homework come in.

(5) **Build your garden:** Do it yourself. Have a landscaping party. Use a gardener or a landscape contractor. Or use a design-build firm such as Grace Design Associates.



TRENDSPOTTING

Water-smart, low-maintenance, fire-smart landscapes: I'll continue doing this forever!

Veggies/food/herb gardens: Tucking them in here and there — front yard, curb strip, pots, rooftop. Another thing I will keep doing forever!

LOVE IT!

Outdoor living: Spaces that function just like rooms in the house — what better place than in our climate? We can live outside most days of the year. It's a lighter environmental footprint and easier on the wallet — great furnishings; shade here, sunny spot there; a roof overhead in places, but walls are totally optional. Skip the cost of a big house, and go for a great garden with "just enough house for in case of rain." (I can't remember who said that.)

Living walls: Super cool look. But they're resource heavy and ill-suited for our climate. Terrestrial plants in our climate survive nine months of drought annually by having their roots in the soil. 'Nuff said.

OVER IT!

Sustainable gardens: It's important to have this in the lexicon, and the intent is more valid than ever. The meaning, however, has been lost through overuse and misapplication. Let's do that which transcends fads and marketing taglines, a shift from buzzword gardens to what I've termed ecological thinking.

In the landscape, focus on a healthy microbial soil suite, the nitrogen cycle, the water cycle, the oxygen cycle; provide habitat (water, food, shelter) for as many components of the native biome as possible.



COURTESY

Knock out a couple of fence boards between neighbors to provide a wildlife corridor; leave a few logs to rot to support bugs, lizards, and salamanders.

Integrated design-build teams: Owner, architect, interior designer, builder, landscape designer, landscape contractor, site engineer — everyone who contributes to the design and construction of the project, working together collaboratively from the very beginning of the project. This allows for the best use of resources, provides efficiencies, and ensures an integrated finished project.

CAN'T WAIT FOR IT!

We work this way as often as we can swing it. (It's not a familiar model for most folks.) A goodly number of the most important things you can do for your landscape are lost by calling the landscape guy in at the end of a project.

Surely, the architecture contributes to the landscape, the construction to the architecture, the interior to the exterior, the design to the maintenance, the site work to the landscape, and on and on. So why are we all acting independently?

See gracedesignassociates.com. For a longer interview, see independent.com/margie.