

Gardening in the ZONE[®]

with Iowa Gardening Magazine's Liz Gilman



Garden Design

Do you ever look through magazines like *Iowa Gardening* and dream of designing beautiful landscapes? Well this week I interviewed Ann Marie VanDerZanden, associate professor of horticulture at Iowa State University, to get some design tips.



Ann Marie VanDerZanden

There are many principles of design and over the years, VanDerZanden has emphasized a group of five principles she thinks are crucial for your landscape. Simplicity, Rhythm and Line, Balance, Proportion and Focal Point.

First, simplicity. This can be created physically or visually. For example, simple bed lines are either straight or gently curved- not complex geometric shapes or patterns. Simple plant forms are those that are rounded or oval as opposed to severely pruned topiary. Visual simplicity is achieved when plants are grouped. These plant masses usually consist of an odd number of plants and can be grouped

by form, texture or color. Landscapes that lack simplicity can look chaotic.

Rhythm and line addresses continuity within a landscape and how the various elements that make up a landscape are integrated into the overall design. It can be a subtle principle but when it isn't done well, it can impact how a landscape looks and feels.

Balance can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Symmetrical balance has an obvious central axis and one side is mirrored on the other. It tends to feel formal. Asymmetrical designs have different objects on each side of a discrete axis but these objects have a similar visual mass. This balance is more informal and works well in residential landscapes.

Proportion refers to the size relationship between different elements within the landscape... plants to buildings, plants to other plants, and plants to people. Proportion will change as the plants grow, but always design based on the plants' mature height and spread.

And finally, VanDerZanden's list includes a focal point. Focal points give the eye a place to rest when viewing the landscape as a whole. It may be a plant, garden accessory, water feature or a front door. Each part of the landscape should have a focal point.

From there, it's up to you to decide how to incorporate these five design basics into your yard. And that's where the fun begins! ✨

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