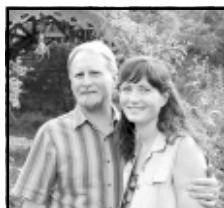


Way to Grow in Orinda

Gardening Trends

Steve & Cathy Lambert



Was doing something more with your yard one of your New Year's resolutions? As the rain and cold weather start to diminish and the trees and bulbs begin to bloom, now is the time to make a plan. So quit beating around the bush.

But where do I start, you ask? Some of the following landscaping trends may provide you with the inspiration you need to start your own garden renovation. Remember that you can begin with an overall design and add new elements to your garden in phases. This approach is much more cost effective, less overwhelming, and allows your garden to evolve into something that often is even more to your liking than you had originally planned.

Water, water everywhere . . .

Nothing is more hypnotizing than the sight and sound of moving water. Water has a very calming effect on people, which is why you see it in so many meditation gardens. Adding a water feature to your landscape can provide a graceful, natural focal point while attracting frogs, dragonflies, and more birds, to your garden as well.

With the introduction of 40-millimeter EPDM fish-safe liners, submersible pumps, and waterfall filters, the building of ponds has become a more reasonable and worthwhile endeavor. The newest and lowest maintenance product on today's market is the pond-less waterfall — a beautiful flowing stream and waterfall that appear to flow into the ground. We have built pond-less streams as long as 25 feet with multiple cascading falls. Whether it's as simple as a bubbling fountain or as elaborate as a pond with waterfalls, water plants, and fish, water is definitely "in" in the garden.

Lighting the way . . .

For your money, there is no better investment in your landscape than lighting. After all, once you've invested the time and money to get your garden looking the way you've always wanted, why not enjoy it

during the evening hours as well?

With the fast paced, busy lives we all lead these days, the evening hours are increasingly becoming the leisure time that we have left to enjoy our yards. To be able to do this, your garden must be well lit. A well-designed nighttime portrait will increase safety and the enjoyment of your yard as it draws you out of the house and into your garden at night.

The list of products available grows constantly from the well-marketed items available at home improvement and hardware stores to quality solid brass fixtures that will long outlast the cheaper options.

Aside from the vast variety of up and down lights, path lights and decorative lights, there are many exciting new focal-point lighting fixtures now available. Imagine a glowing, frosted-glass birdbath with a light built into its base and light beaming upward. Or, outdoor table lamps and chandeliers with bulbs that look like real burning candles to light up your outdoor room and entertainment space. For a double whammy, add some lighting to your pond or back-light the falls along your stream. But please, please stay away from colored lights in your landscape unless you like the look of amusement parks and miniature golf courses.

If you are considering lighting your landscape, we recommend a low voltage lighting system. With the right fixtures, it will last many years. Low voltage also allows much greater flexibility than 110 volt lighting, which is rigid and difficult to add to or change. Today's solar lighting systems have very limited uses because the batteries included cannot create consistent light or provide anything more than a pathway or driveway marker. Truly effective and efficient solar lighting is, by our estimate, about five years away. A lot of advancements have been made recently with LED (light emitting diodes) lights. However, LED has not truly impressed us, and we think it needs several more years to improve system flaws and prove itself as a viable landscape lighting choice. We plan

to write an entire article on landscape lighting in the future.

Fire's light to warm the night . . .

As people start using their yards more at night, warmth becomes an issue, especially here in Orinda where even summer evenings are relatively cool. Due to new building codes, wood-burning fireplaces can no longer be built with gas outdoor fireplaces becoming the alternative. The newer gas outdoor fireplaces are made to look just like a real wood-burning fire, and they are as easy to operate as pushing a button, then bam, instant warmth and atmosphere. There is also a great selection of gas fire pits on the market today. There's your basic ring-style fire pit that conjures the desire for marshmallows on a stick to the more dramatic effect of flames that seem to come from out of the ground itself. Or add a brass reflecting fire bowl near your pool or water feature for a totally hypnotic effect.

Room to Grow . . .

If you're cramped for space indoors but you can't build up or add on, consider adding an outdoor room. Many homeowners are realizing the joy of cooking and entertaining outdoors. Build an outdoor kitchen, dining room, or sitting area where your ceiling is the planets and stars.

People are spending almost as much on their outdoor kitchens as they are on indoor kitchen remodels these days. Aside from the typical outdoor kitchen features like built-in gas barbecues with rotisserie and side burners, an outdoor mini fridge and sink, we have also added pizza ovens, wine coolers, woks, and kegerators.

Vineyard on the hillside . . .

The choices for planting the many sloping lots here in the Lamorinda area have traditionally included junipers and grasses or terracing with rock walls for rose gardens, cutting gardens, and vegetable gardens. The latest trend for utilizing your hillside acreage is to plant your own vineyard. A vineyard is not only aesthetically pleasing but cost effective too.

The best varieties for the Orinda area are Petit Syrah and Pinot Noir. Plant as few as 70 vines and within 2 to 3 years your harvest will produce over a barrel full of grape juice. This trend is growing at such a popular rate that there are now several local companies who will plant, maintain, harvest, and bottle your own vintage for you with a custom label.

With home ownership at an all time high, more people are expanding their living areas into the great outdoors. According to Landscape Management Magazine, in 2004 homeowners spent an estimated \$6.7 billion on landscaping and gardening services.

These are investments that will not only provide you with years of added enjoyment and pride in your garden, but they will also increase your property value when the time comes to sell your home.

So now, can you visualize yourself entertaining in your beautifully lit outdoor room with the sounds of trickling water and the warmth of a fire while enjoying great barbecue and a glass of your own home-grown wine? Then I'd say you've got more than a starting place.

If you have specific questions about any of these gardening trends please email Cathy and Steve Lambert at gardenlights@comcast.net.