



Add Square Footage to Your Haven - Just Go Outside and Take It!?

by Cecile Garrison, UC Master Gardener

Have weeds taken over your back yard? Have the areas between your neighbor's fence and your home become storage space for items you haven't used in years? Has your yard turned into a jungle? Fall is the best season to spruce up our gardens and reclaim unused areas for additional living space. The following steps will help us add square footage to our entertainment, play and meditation spaces:

First, you need a plan! Walk the area with family. Make a list of what needs to be discarded, donated or refurbished. Is the area in full sun, morning sun, shade, etc? Is the automatic sprinkler system in good repair? Many gardens have been initiated well, but perished when the homeowner got sidetracked with life and forgot to water.



Next, you need to take action! Work down your list. Put your gloves on and eliminate weeds, overgrown perennials, and spent annuals. Start with clean flowerbeds and amend the soil if necessary. At this point we add two to three inches of "composted" steer manure. My husband and I have a running argument-he wants it tilled into the soil and I say, "That's fine but you don't have to."

What will you plant? Did you know that October is a great time of year to plant trees and shrubs and flowers and bulbs and... well just about everything? You can even dig up and move plants and small trees that are in the wrong locations, or seed, patch, and sod fescue lawns. Exceptions are tropical plants like citrus, palms, and bird of paradise; they're best planted and moved in spring.

What is your vision? When you are inside looking out do you feel connected to the view? Is it inviting and easily accessible? Consider each window an opportunity to develop beautiful vignettes which beckon you and your guests outside. A birdbath, birdfeeder, statuary or a bench surrounded by ornamental grasses is simple and pleasing to the eye.



Create interest with a narrow pathway that disappears around a focal point to an unseen part of the garden. We use decomposed granite or small pebbles for our pathways, but you can find manufactured pavers for as little as \$1.00 a square foot or splurge on poured concrete for solid footing.

Conversation areas are a must! A bistro table with two chairs creates a cozy spot for morning coffee with your friend. If you have lots of space splurge on a harvest table with benches. If your space is limited use furniture with thin frames and petite bodies and make the area appear larger. If your seating areas are not covered consider inexpensive umbrellas for shade.



Our family Thanksgiving celebration always involves a fire pit surrounded by cousins, uncles and aunts we haven't seen all year catching up on everyone else's activities. With little kids roasting marshmallows, teenagers making s'mores, and old men telling tall tales, you won't find a better "outdoor room!"

Don't forget lighting to keep the party going. Candles, lanterns, and inexpensive landscape lighting can illuminate stairs, walkways and water features.

I hope this helps you plan to take back some of that unused outdoor space and add square footage to your living space! Call the Master Gardener office or visit our website for additional information on plant selection, soil preparation and weed and pest control.