



GARDEN DESIGN: WHERE DO I START?

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During the past year, we have been at home more and this has given us an opportunity to look at and use our gardens throughout the seasons. While the garden has become a way to expand living space, it may not be living up to your expectations. You may have a small area that needs a new planting design or you have thought about a complete redesign of your entire yard. Summer is a great time to prepare for a design by taking a site inventory and analyzing existing conditions for problems or potential.

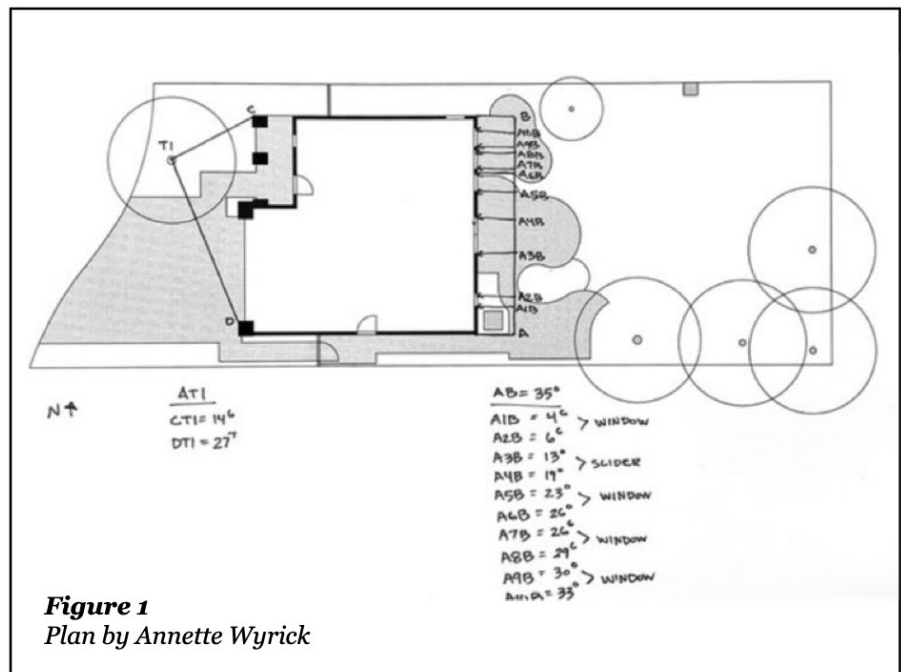
The first phase is to gather basic information about your site. A plat, a map of your residence and property lines, may be obtained from your county's surveying and mapping department. The county will have information on setbacks, easements and rights-of-way on your property. If you live within a HOA, obtain information on landscape covenants.

Continuing to gather information, you will take photos and measurements of your site. Shooting "before" photos of your home's exterior walls and existing hardscape will be a helpful reminder of the materials and patterns already existing in your garden. Taking photos from each window or door into the garden will show you the primary views. Maybe you will find views you can borrow beyond your property line.

After taking photos, it is a good time to draw a sketch of your property. Start with a bird's eye view of your residence and property lines.

Record measurements for these first. Depending on how large and detailed your landscape is, you may need to sketch sections on separate sheets of paper. Sketch other structures (sheds, garage, etc.), existing hardscape (paths, patios, pools, etc.), utilities (septic/leach zone, propane, power lines, water meter, etc.), and plants.

Next is measuring the existing elements of your site. Start by checking the location of your residence in relation to the property lines. Sometimes the actual build differs from the plat. The corners of the property are usually indicated with a stake in the ground, mark in concrete, or other similar indications. If you are uncertain where the property lines are, seek the help of a surveyor.



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References/Resources

- Hansen, Gail and Erin Alvarez. *Landscape Design: Analyzing Site Conditions*. University of Florida, Environmental Horticulture. May 8, 2019. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP426>
- Hansen, Gail and Erin Alvarez. *Landscape Design: Putting Your Yard on Paper- Site Measurements and Base Maps*. University of Florida, Environmental Horticulture. May 8, 2019. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP427>

UC Master Gardeners of Placer County are University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) ambassadors to the Placer County home gardening community. Master Gardeners promote environmental awareness and sustainable landscape practices, and extend research-based gardening and composting information to the public through educational outreach. UCCE is part of the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) of the University of California.