

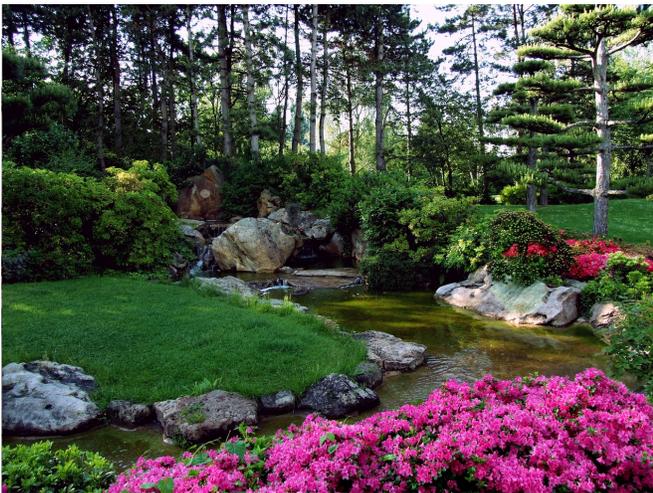
Designing a Beautiful Garden

Principles of Scale and Balance

Creating a well-designed garden involves integrating the elements and principles of design to craft a harmonious and visually engaging space. According to the Oklahoma State University Extension fact sheet, [Homeowner Garden Design Series: Elements and Principles of Design HLA-6441](#), the six elements of garden design—line, form, texture, color, value, and mass—are the building blocks of a garden's aesthetic. These elements work together with the six principles of design—scale, balance, rhythm, emphasis, simplicity, and unity—to bring structure, mood, and flow to the landscape. While all these principles are vital, this installment will be introducing scale and balance as foundational concepts that ensure the garden feels cohesive and proportionate.

Scale: Creating Proportion and Harmony

Scale refers to the size of objects in the garden in relation to one another and to the overall space. Logically, the reference size is an average human adult - how a person would view from standing or sitting, how fast or slow an average walking pace to cover an area, or how long or high a person would step if navigating stairs or slopes. Achieving appropriate scale is essential for creating a garden that feels neither overwhelming nor sparse. Properly scaled design ensures that all elements—plants, structures, and hardscape—fit seamlessly within their environment.



For example, in a small urban garden, towering trees or large, coarse-textured plants may seem out of place, dominating the space and making it feel crowded. Instead, compact shrubs, small trees like Japanese maples, and fine-textured perennials can provide proportional scale, complementing the confined setting. Conversely, in a large rural garden, tiny flower beds or short plants might feel lost, requiring the introduction of large masses of vegetation or taller plants to anchor the design.

Scale also applies to garden accessories and structures. A large fountain may serve as a stunning focal point in a sprawling estate garden but would overpower a modest backyard. Similarly, pathways should be proportionate to the garden's size; a narrow, winding path may feel appropriate in a cottage garden, while a wide, straight pathway suits formal landscapes.

Balance: Achieving Visual Stability

Balance ensures that a garden feels visually stable and harmonious. It can be achieved in two primary ways: symmetrical balance and asymmetrical balance.

“**Symmetrical balance**” is often associated with formal gardens, where design elements are mirrored on either side of a central axis. For instance, a traditional garden might feature a pathway flanked by identical rows of boxwood hedges, leading to a central fountain or statue. This approach conveys order, elegance, and stability, making it ideal for spaces where structure and precision are desired.



“**Asymmetrical balance**”, on the other hand, relies on visual weight rather than exact duplication. It is often used in



informal or naturalistic gardens, where the design feels more organic. For example, a large tree on one side of the garden might be balanced by a cluster of smaller shrubs on the opposite side. Similarly, a colorful mass of flowers in one area can be offset by a textured stone bench or a dramatic hardscape feature in another. This type of balance creates interest while maintaining harmony.

Achieving balance also involves considering color, texture, and mass. Light-colored or fine-textured plants appear lighter and may need more volume to balance darker, coarser plants. Hardscape features, like pergolas or stone

walls, can provide additional visual weight, helping to balance open areas or clusters of lighter plantings.

Conclusion

By understanding and applying the principles of scale and balance, gardeners can create spaces that feel cohesive and inviting. Scale ensures that all elements fit comfortably within the garden’s context, while balance provides visual stability and harmony. Together, these principles form the foundation of a garden that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing, setting the stage for further design enhancements.

As this series continues next month, we will discuss the next two principles of design - rhythm and emphasis - in the arsenal of strategies used to combine elements into one cohesive garden

Resources:

[Oklahoma Gardening Design Series: Types of Plantings](#)

[Homeowner Garden Design Series: Elements and Principles of Design](#)