

With gardens — it's location, location, location

▼ Design in advance to avoid problems later.

Site Assessment. What is it and why do you care? It's vitally important in creating landscape designs that work for people. Landscape site assessment includes evaluating the current condition and elements of the existing landscape, and understanding the specific needs and desires of the garden owners.

"The goal of this process is to put the pieces of this puzzle together to obtain a pleasing design that meets the owner's requirements," says Kate Easton, president of Garden Vision Inc. in Port Orchard.

All future design work is based on all the information collected during site assessment. To understand the project requirements, most designers use a checklist to gather information about the landscape.

Garden Vision Inc., uses a five-page site assessment worksheet to record information that is observed and discussed with the garden owners. Such things as the current plant material, the soil condition, location of water, electrical, gas lines, location of traffic patterns, and other key items that may impact the final design are noted on the worksheet. Also, other elements such as the location of sports and garden equipment, outdoor water sources, and accommodations for pets are taken into account. The condition



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Spring time is cherry blossom time across the nation. But trees and orchards, like flowers and gardens, don't just happen automatically without advance planning. You must take into account plant materials, soil conditions, water, utility lines, and pedestrian traffic patterns.

of the plants in the landscape and the appropriateness of their location can also suggest some changes to be included in the design.

One common problem to overcome is the plant that has grown too big for its original location, Easton said.

Site assessment also includes surveying the landscape (i.e., measuring where each key element is located in relationship to the structures) and measuring the dimensions of structures (or obtaining existing floor plans).

"Where the house is located is important to the view from the street,

or the view from within the house to the garden outside," Easton said.

Photographs of the site are helpful in recording some details and help to provide visual reminders during the design process.

The most important part of the assessment, however, is talking with the garden owner to gather information about what they like about the current situation and what they want to change. Some owners will have specific plants they want in the landscape, others want to exclude some plants.

For example, if the owner is allergic

to certain pollens, those plants would not be appropriate in the design. Some owners want to add screen material to hide a view of the street, others may want to clear an area to have a better view.

Once all the site assessment information is gathered, the existing landscape and structures are drawn in a plan view. The next step is designing a new garden or renovating an existing one, using the existing plan view as the base.

The existing plan will show areas to avoid planting large trees too close to a house or power line, or suggest additional pathways to reach a pool area or boat dock.

The site assessment is like drawing a map of where a traveler is starting from and the final design is the map of the final destination — a vibrant, verdant and restful garden.

(Garden Vision Incorporated, based in Port Orchard, delivers award winning GardenVisionScapes and horticulture consulting to clients in Washington and other western states. Specializing in creating custom landscape designs that exceed expectations through the strategic placement of common and uncommon plant material and hardscape, Garden Vision Incorporated assures customer satisfaction. From complete landscape design plans, to maintenance practices advice, to landscape renovation, Garden Vision Incorporated has served residential and business clients since 1990. For more information, contact the main office at (360) 895-5173 or visit the Web site at <http://gardenvisioninc.com>.)

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