

Plant Exchange

Dreaming About Spring



PHOTOS: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Public gardens are resources for ideas in your own backyard. These garden design tips were inspired from staff at the Smithsonian Gardens in Washington D.C. Fall photos to illustrate the tips were shot at the regional public Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha, Nebraska.

Backyard Ideas From Public Gardens

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

Even a small space rectangular backyard is just the size for some of the ideas displayed at the Smithsonian Gardens in Washington, D.C. Staff at the gardens gave practical yard and flower garden design tips in the January/February 2015 Horticulture magazine.

Smithsonian Gardens' staff tips from their public gardens inspired the pointers below. To illustrate Smithsonian Garden staff ideas, photo examples were taken at the skillfully landscaped Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha, Nebraska.

1. Create curves. Most backyards have right angle boundaries, so curve the flowerbeds wherever possible. Consider curves in hardscape such as retaining walls of landscape blocks. Perhaps a curved arbor entrance to the yard fits your style.

2. Vary leaf textures. The more opposite the texture the more it stands out. A fine ornamental grass contrasts with an evergreen tree.

3. Dual duty is practical for a small space,

such as with edible herb sage, gold Celosia, and purple fountain grass. Ornamental chairs or birdbaths are other examples.

4. Add creative surprises. A cultivar of dock, commonly grown for animal feed, provides the ornamental ground cover in a full sun area.

5. Create vertical interest. A boundary crabapple tree provides its spring flowers, glossy leaves and shade, and fruit for birds.

6. Ignite your senses. Some areas have space for a pond. A water interest in a small space can be the sound of an aquarium bubbler in a ceramic bowl. Scented flowers and single plant lights for the evening are options.

7. Miniature garden in a garden can add a fun atmosphere to your back yard. Maybe the miniature garden repeats your back yard theme.

Public gardens have plenty of landscape ideas that can be used in a small space backyard. As you think about the possibilities for your backyard, many major gardens have on-line information of interest such as the plant-related videos at the Smithsonian Gardens website. www.gardens.si.edu



A Special Tree For A Special Spot

BY MARY ANN KING
Master Gardener

Most people love a maple tree, especially in the fall as the tree develops into a firestorm of red, yellow and bronze. As we all are most familiar with the large standard maple trees that fill our landscapes, I would love to introduce gardeners to the Japanese maple tree. Offering graceful forms, vivid foliage colors and sizes from dwarf to full size, this tree will become a favorite in your landscape.

In my own garden, two special "spots" are each home to a Japanese maple tree that draws attention all year long.

Yankton gardens are in a planting zone area allowing these trees to grow fairly easily. The Zone 5 to 8 cultivars prefer moist, well-drained and slightly acidic soil. Choose a location away from strong winds and blazing sun. These trees thrive in sun-dappled shade or morning sun with afternoon shade, since they are prone to scorched leaves.

Japanese maple trees, though not heavy feeders, do benefit from an annual all-purpose fertilizer after the first year growth. Mulching at the base out to the drip-line of the tree with natural, organic material, 2 to 3 inches deep, insulates the roots and aids in moisture retention.

These trees naturally develop a graceful style and form, making them very easy to maintain size, with pruning required only every few years to remove deadwood, cross branches and renew shaping. This is best done in the late fall or early winter to avoid excessive sap loss. These showy trees are also very resistant to pests and disease.

Fall planting six weeks before the first frost allows the tree time to settle in before winter. Water deeply before ground freezing takes place.

In the wintertime remove heavy snow from the treetop by a gently brushing to prevent branches from breaking. Ice covered tree branches must be left alone.

Which tree to choose? This is a fun

task! With tree forms from cascading, upright, rounded, weeping and mounding, to heights from 2 to 30 feet, there are many Japanese maple choices. Leaf types can be lacy, feather-like, and palm shape, with color palettes ranging from red, orange, green, purple, and pink to white. These chameleons of the plant world can leaf out in the spring with red, change to green in summer and finish in the fall with a blaze of orange. Please be sure to limit tree choices to Zone 5 cultivars.

Some Japanese maple trees lend themselves to container planting. This can be lovely; however, know that the potted tree will require a large container that will have to be moved to a sheltered location over the winter. Special handling throughout the winter months will also be required, so research well before deciding on a container planted tree.

With more than 700 unique cultivars, there will be a Japanese maple tree that will fill that very special "spot" in your garden.

Midwest Flower Field Trial Results

The November Greenhouse Grower is a horticulture trade magazine that published 2014 flower field trial results provided from several Midwest universities and public gardens. At Greenhouse Grower (Website: www.greenhouse-grower.com) one can see more Midwest trials. Below are selected top flower performers in our geographic region from the plants each institution selected and grew. (To view the flower bloom and get more information, Internet search the flower's name.) Midwest top flowering plant performers named varieties of canna and celosia in common high regard for beauty, adaptability to local growing conditions, and growth in the annual season.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA- MORRIS

(They noted weather conditions were below normal temperatures and above normal rainfall in 2014.)
Best in Show: Lantana 'Little Lucky Orange'

Top Performers:
Canna 'Cannova Yellow'
Salvia 'Playin' the Blues'
Salvia splendens 'Abazin Purple'
Euphorbia 'Diamond Delight'
Coreopsis grandiflora 'Sun Up'

REIMAN GARDENS-IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

(Ames, Iowa temperatures

were 5-10 degrees cooler than average and less heat tolerant trials showed longer as a result. Plants that needed more heat such as, Echinacea didn't perform as well this season.)

Best in Show: Canna Cannova Series

Top Performers:
Acalypha 'Jungle Cloak'
Celosia 'Arrabona Red'
Big Bounce Impatiens Series
Osteospermum 'Blue Eyed Beauty'
Petunia 'Sanguna Radiant Blue'

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

(Fargo university plant science department trial manager commented that weather in June and the first half of July was cool and wet. Pennisetum ornamental grasses had many visitor positive comments.)

Best in Show: Celosia 'Arrabona Red'

Top Performers:
Canna 'Cannova Red Shades'
Canna 'Cannova Rose'
Canna 'Cannova Yellow'
Meccardonia 'Gold Dust'
Gaura 'Sparkle White'
Angelonia 'Serenita Raspberry'
Celosia 'Fresh Look Gold'
Pennisetum setaceum
Melinis nervigulmis (end of season)

Dibbles And Bits

• **DR. DAVID GRAPER** reported the 2014 plant trials at McCrory Gardens in Brookings SD. He is a South Dakota Extension horticulturist, and Professor of Horticulture at South Dakota State University (SDSU). About 150 varieties were trialed at the gardens. Most varieties were grown from seed in SDSU greenhouses and transplanted. They planted seeds provided by Ball Floraplant, Ball Ingenuity, Burpee Home Gardens, Kieft Seed, Pan American Seed, Proven Winners, Selecta, and Terra Nova. June temperatures were cooler than average as seedlings were transplanted. July and August were hotter and dryer than average. The gardens are irrigated. Unique to these trials, seeds were grown in ground, in pots, and in hanging baskets. Results of all plants can be found at the SDSU igrow.org website in the "Garden" section where a download of trials, plant by plant, is available.

• **AMONG NATIONAL** gardening trends, 75 million U.S. households

have lawns, gardens, or grow plants in containers. Survey conducted for Garden Writers Association was published in October 2014. It showed that among these households, 58% plan to grow edible plants in the ground, in containers, and sometimes both next year. Gardening concerns for these households include insect and disease control, wildlife control, irrigation, and cost of gardening.

• **ANY ICE MELT** product with chloride in the ingredients is harmful in contact with plants, whether it is calcium chloride, magnesium chloride, or sodium chloride, according to Dr. John Ball, forest health specialist for SD Department of Agriculture and extension forester for SD Cooperative Extension. Plant buds and foliage can accumulate toxic chloride and cause dieback or scorch in trees, shrubs, and turf grass after repeated exposure over the winter. He says that chloride enters the plant when the roots absorb it through runoff or in direct bud contact with salt-laden snow piled on plants. To minimize damage, Ball suggests using a salt substitute such as cat litter or saw-

dust for traction. By clearing snow off the ice before salt application, less salt is needed to melt ice. Flushing salts with water in early spring helps dilute and remove some salt. More topics can be found at his "Pest Update" <http://sdda.sd.gov/conservation-forestry/forest-health/tree-pest-alerts/>

• **SOME VEGETABLES**, especially cucumbers of the Cucurbit family turn bitter under drought or other stress growing conditions in summer. While bitterness is selected against as a home garden trait, cucumbers have long been valued as "bitter fruit" in Chinese and India herbal medicine. Wild cucumbers, including its leaves, are quite bitter. Bitterness as a trait may act as the cucumber plant's protection from insects in time of growing stress or an attractant to specific insects. Eleven genes have been identified as collectively responsible for bitterness and their interaction are under study. As well, the interaction that resulted in domestic, usually not bitter cucumbers is under study. Cucurbitacins found in bitter cucumbers can slow or stop cancer

cell growth in humans. To learn more about the interaction of the genes and the masked domestic usually not bitter genes, researchers grew cucumbers in cool night conditions as a stressor. As more is known about these interactions, then cucurbitacins may be manufactured for use in anti-tumor drugs or other medicines. Source: 28 November, 2014 Science magazine, "Biosynthesis, regulation, and domestication of bitterness in cucumber."

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or tell us what you enjoy most about these plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson. Blog www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com.

February Plant Tips

Beth Preheim is an experienced gardener who has grown a wide variety of tomatoes at the Yankton Community Gardens the past five years. Thanks to Preheim for her tomato recommendations that are intended as a resource as you find best tomatoes for your needs where you garden.

She grows tomato transplants from seeds at home to plant at the Yankton Community Gardens. She has kept careful records to find which tomatoes yield the best tomatoes for eating fresh in summer. She wants tomatoes that grow well in the conditions at the community gardens, are tasty and disease resistant.

Setting at the gardens is full sun with wind exposure, clay loam soil, adequate moisture available with nearby water taps, limited space with heavy crop use, and single event hail, and torrential rain. Blight has been a continuing problem for gardeners, including last season, so her recommendations refer to her several years of growing tomatoes.

For her tomato tips on "How To Grow Tomatoes", see the Plant Exchange Blog under the vegetable category at: <http://brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com/>

Some varieties of tomatoes are not available as transplants locally. She indicates the seed company source because varieties' common names may vary among companies. P = Pine Tree Garden Seeds J = Johnny's Select Seeds

HYBRID TOMATOES

• **JET STAR:** My standard every year. It's widely available and according to Iowa Cooperative Extension, a top producing tomato in Iowa. Medium slicer. Vine is manageable with standard tomato cages. Transplant available in greenhouses.

• **SUNGOLD:** Prolific sweet cherry tomato with flavor. Widely available.

• **CLUSTER GRANDE:** Clusters of 3 inch round tomatoes on sturdy, average vines.

• **BELLSTAR:** Very small paste tomato that sets fruit early and grows about 2-3 feet tall. Tapers production by the time others get going. Handles drought well.

• **POLBIG:** Early start that stays small, and sets fruit early in cool weather. Slicing tomatoes are 3-4 inches. Slows down as other tomatoes get going.

• **TIP TOP:** Patio tomato can be grown in a pot with 2 inch tomatoes.

HEIRLOOM TOMATOES

• **ITALIAN HEIRLOOM:** Large slicing tomato with good flavor. Handled blight well.

• **BRANDYWINE:** Large slicing tomato with good flavor. Handled blight well.

• **CHEROKEE PURPLE:** Another large slicing tomato with beautiful purple tone.

• **AMISH PASTE:** Bit sweeter and larger than many paste varieties. First recommended by other South Dakota gardeners. Seed came from Lancaster County, PA, Preheim's childhood home.

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