

## Tips on Interior Landscaping

**P**LANTS AND FLOWERS can be directly associated with contentment and happiness. Direct contact with nature and plants can develop a mental wholeness necessary to man's overall well being.

An excellent example is the office landscaping concept, which some eight or ten years ago was initiated in West Germany as "Burolandschaft". The concept consists of various arrangements of office furniture, using a few screens, and many live indoor plants and trees, all judiciously placed with the complete absence of partitions. In other words, the traditional office cubicle is gone.

Interior landscaping today basically consists of three general areas: homes, offices, and the more intricate and expanded commercial designs. Ideas for each are unlimited and may be as simple or elaborate as space and conditions permit.

The private homeowner often has the most freedom with his interior gardens. These may range from a few plants on a windowsill to a lean-to-greenhouse, to an entire solarium room, depending upon:

- The amount of light intensity.
- How much time and care can be allotted to maintenance
- The amount of space available for proper placement as related to design elements

Types of plants and trees to be used also depend on available light and humidity. Most tropical plants are grown in Florida or California.

Recently home owners are turning to house trees in preference to house

plants. A house tree is a plant large enough to have developed its own individual character. Sizes can range from 5' to 8' tall (sometimes up to 15' to 20') and are preferably not pinched, sheared or trained, but rather grown as nature intended.

A house tree can be thought of as an architectural element, or a "living sculpture." It can serve as a very functional part of a decor, creating interest, color, texture, and form to complement the simplicity or richness of almost any residential interior.

Special attention should be given to the color and texture of leaves, stem or trunk structure, and overall height and span as related to textures, weaves, colors and patterns existing in draperies, slipcovers, floor coverings, wall finishes, and upholstery.

For example, a home designed with an Oriental influence might utilize several varieties of trees, such as the Bamboo Palm (*Chamaedorea erumpens*) or the Chinese Aralia (Ming Tree). A more Victorian decor might employ a Kentia Palm (*Howea forsteriana*) or a Giant Dumb Cane (*Dieffenbachia amoena*).

Interior foliage can grace almost any room in the home.

The office landscaping concept described earlier is more limited in the species and size range desired. As a rule the plants and trees used serve a very functional purpose, as well as a decorative one.

At the ends of partitioning screens, plants ranging from 4' to 8' may be placed with an overall spread of 18" to 26", depending upon available space and the desired overall effect intended. Usually a designer or architect will specify placement areas with many variations in mind.

A very lush effect may be specified which would utilize twice as many plants for a more dense but effective design. Generally, open offices have good interior lighting available, ranging from 125 to 150 foot candles, often supplemented with natural lighting in window areas.

Special areas such as cafeterias,

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Intricate and expanded commercial designs may include the largest variety of interior foliage imaginable.

Hotel and bank lobbies have been turned into massive and exciting interior gardens using waterfalls, fountains, and streams to make the plantings as natural and refreshing as possible. To create a well designed and unified effect within the planting, sizes ranging from 40' trees to tiny ground cover creepers are often specified.

An enclosed shopping mall can be made more attractive by the addition of tropical plants and trees. Use of skylighting facilitates the existence of large trees to turn the public area into a year-round seasonal park situation.

Selection of planting material available is virtually unlimited. One of the largest problems, however, concerns the quality of the material.

As I mentioned before, most of the tropical plants used in interior plantings originate in Florida or in California. There they are grown in full sunlight of 10,000 foot candles with a relative humidity of 80 to 90 percent and natural rainfall, with supplementary irrigation constantly available.

When placed in our interior environ-



*Above, a hotel lobby. Above top, a foundation's interior garden. Right, an office planting.*

lounches, reception areas, and elevator lobbies may receive unusual treatments with a wider range in height and overall spread. Outstanding specimen trees may be used for creating interesting effects.

ment, these same plants and trees are expected to live in conditions of opposite intensity. Lighting is reduced to 150 foot candles, humidity drops to 15 percent or less, and watering usually occurs every 7 days.

Naturally, one would expect very poor results from this massive shock to the plant's system. Leaves turn yellow and drop, foliage and branch die-back occur, and the natural resistance to disease is weakened.

What is the solution? Each plant and tree must be subjected to gradual conditioning or acclimatizing before it is ready to be used in an interior area. The conditioning must include an adjustment period for the plants, where they can be exposed to increasingly less light, water and humidity over a period of time.

Heavily shaded greenhouses and cloth houses are used at the present time, but even these cannot produce the desired results. Humidity and sunlight are hard to regulate as they depend on the elements (sunny days vs. rainy or cloudy days). Hopefully in the near future we will begin to see a more perfected means of acclimating in order that "interior shock" can be eliminated completely.

Plant sources today are rapidly expanding. Plants in small amounts are available in retail plant specialty shops, supermarkets, variety stores, and flower shops. Garden centers supply a wider selection in varieties and sizes. Often a complete reference area is available to enable you to do research. It is most important to know your plants, realize their growing conditions, and employ proper maintenance precautions.

Large scale plantings are usually purchased from the more specialized interior landscaping firms that facilitate acclimating in their own greenhouses, and have the space and volume to deal with the quantities needed for office landscaping and complex commercial jobs. These larger specialized firms can offer more expert advice, individual maintenance programs, and rental or leasing plans.

Professional maintenance programs

involve complete plant servicing including watering, feeding, cleaning, and spraying. Rental plans are especially effective for flower shows, display areas, temporary plant placement, or general convenience.

Selection of plants as related to the available environmental conditions is a topic of extreme importance. Generally, tropical plants can be placed in three categories based on necessary light intensity: low, medium, and high light levels.

Low light plant varieties are usually the hardiest species, requiring light ranging from 50 to 75 foot candles. Medium light plant varieties are more sensitive to drafts and available humidity, and need between 75 and 200 foot candles. High light plant varieties require 200 or more foot candles and are most sensitive to a correct maintenance program.

The dracaena family and the philodendron family include perhaps the hardiest plant varieties commonly used for interior foliage plantings. Light specifications can range from 25 to 150 foot candles, with higher light naturally determining better growth and strength. These families can take the most abuse and lack of watering, and so are classed among the favorites for interior uses of all types.

Here are some general notes on plant care:

Do not overwater. This is by far the most frequent cause of plant failure. It is far better to have a dryness present than to have the plant virtually soaked and standing in water. The roots will begin to rot and will destroy the plant's general health.

The amount of water used should depend on the type of pot (clay or plastic—clay tends to absorb and evaporate more water as it is a porous substance) and the size of the pot as related to the root system.

Allow for proper drainage within the pot. For house plants, put a layer of crushed stone or pebbles beneath the planting medium. For larger plants and trees which are often placed in individual planters, two systems of drain-

age are recommended: a layer of crushed stone at the base of the outer planter and also at the base of the inner plant pot. It is advisable to mix porous substances such as perlite and peat moss within the actual planting medium.

Do not over-fertilize. Basic nutrients are found within good planting media; however, they do occasionally need to be supplemented. Two or three times a year is usually more than sufficient, otherwise a buildup of mineral salts occurs and may impair plant growth.

Remember to spray plants occasionally as a disease preventative measure. Research common pests and diseases to which your plant varieties are susceptible. It is far better to take the necessary precautions than to risk the plant's health. Be sure to carefully follow the manufacturer's directions.

Plants also need to be cleaned and dusted, once a week if possible. To maintain the esthetically pleasing natural gloss of leaves, "mist" the leaf surfaces occasionally with water or with a weak solution of mild soap and water, or a leaf shining product available in most garden centers. Again, follow instructions.

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## *Trees and Shrubs for the Landscape*

**T**REES AND SHRUBS form a significant part of most landscape plantings. Many kinds are available, and because of their diverse characteristics they can be used to develop many interesting and functional landscape compositions. The possibilities are almost unlimited.

The most effective landscape plantings are groupings of plants arranged in a pleasing or functional manner. Solitary plants, haphazardly arranged, are seldom effective. Consequently, a well thought out basic landscape scheme is necessary before plant selections are made.

Basic planning should include determining the location and shape of the planting beds; the need for decoration, shade, screen or windbreak; and the consideration of other home and garden activities. Once the basic plan has been determined, then selection of plants can proceed.

Selecting trees and shrubs for landscape use is similar to selecting other items for the home and garden. The more you know about the product you intend to buy, in this case trees and shrubs, the more likely you will be satisfied with the end results. Information should include not only desirable characteristics but also those features that might have an influence on the performance and suitability of the plant as it develops and matures.

Sources of this information should be varied. Numerous garden books are available. A partial listing of useful books is given at the end of this chapter. Additional information is often available through cooperative extension offices and is especially helpful in providing information on the local performance of specific trees and shrubs.

Where possible, I recommend that every effort be made to see the living plant before final selection is made. This means visits to a garden center or local nursery, a botanic garden or arboretum, or, in some cases, to a neighbor who has the plant growing in his landscape plantings.

All sorts of information should be assembled about trees and shrubs before final selections are made. Most of the rest of this chapter is devoted to the things to look for.

Winter hardiness potential is of special significance for woody plants in most sections of the United States. Trees and shrubs differ in their ability to tolerate the cold of winter, and hardiness ratings have been established for most kinds. However, this information for newer introductions may be lacking.

Most books give a winter hardiness rating for each plant covered. This should be carefully noted for each kind of plant considered for landscape use.