

Gardening by Zones

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The main thing about gardening in our region with such a variety of natural features distinguishing our residential lots, is how we want to interact with them and create an environment that is inviting. Our properties range from virtually undisturbed forestland to subdivisions carved out of open areas.

Your garden can be an extension of you and your living space, a place where you are surrounded by a habitat that you help create and that gives you pleasure. It can be high maintenance or virtually maintenance free.

One may simply want a quiet spot for relaxation, or may wish to host a variety of activities in the garden. Many of us have homes that are in the middle of nature while others may want to create a natural setting.

When designing your garden by zones, imagine your house at the center of concentric circles, each of which has a different ecosystem from wetland to dryland. A key is to design zones that support your goals, needs, activities and mood. The approaches described below are adapted from zones found in nature.

Habitat gardening is when your property is a natural environment relatively undisturbed. You can think of your home as a “campsite” in nature and simply create places to sit and enjoy or paths to walk and commune. The emphasis here is to maintain the plant community, make it hospitable and augment it with native plants, wildflowers, or with some colorful flowers and shrubs that complement nature and have similar needs.

Close to your home where runoff from roofs and pavements make water more available, a wet zone or rain garden can take shape. It is also a zone where deciduous or evergreen plants can give shade and privacy. This would be a zone cooler than outlying areas of your yard and have easy access for outdoors dining, relaxing activities, perhaps entertaining as a natural extension of your home. In our ecosystem it would be like a riparian or creek-like setting with plenty of shade and perhaps even a water feature or water garden, containers or beds with colorful and fragrant flowers.

Beyond the wet zone can be a zone transitioning to a low water, low maintenance zone. In this zone could be fruit trees and perhaps a vegetable garden. Surrounding this area can be an herb garden or rock garden with fragrant perennial culinary or medicinal herbs or herbs like lavender, mixed with sun-loving flowers and ground covers. Herb gardens are very hardy, use little water and resist pests and animals.

Beyond the transition zone could be open space devoted to low water, low maintenance xeriscape vegetation. It might be like our high desert with native trees and shrubs, cacti, native grasses or ground cover, including rocks, and drought tolerant colorful vegetation.

There is a simple garden planning guide available on the Gardens for Humanity website www.gardensforhumanity.org. It may help stimulate your thinking and research as you plan your garden. Planning and imagining are a big part of the enjoyment of designing your garden.