

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

# Structure, function, and vision

BY SIOUX ROGERS



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The overstated-but-underrated “Wow, I can’t believe it’s winter already” just happened! In cold climates with well demarcated seasons, winter is often when you pore over all the plentiful seed and plant catalogs. It’s a wonderful time to hunker down, plan ahead, review, and preview. Most likely your garden is rather bare, so it’s a great time to check things out. Finally, look...you can see the trees through the forest.

Gardens age, change, need a new “address,” don’t eat well, miss a friend who used to live next door but was eaten by a gopher, really want to be left alone or are no longer serving the intended purpose. Time to reevaluate.

A “successful” garden is comprised of several features, easily expressed in a variety of ways. For example, a garden has structure, function, and perhaps a vision, be it large or small. OMG, what am I talking about?

**Structure**

Structure can be created by paths, large boulders, big or small pots, permanent planting beds, and garden art of any



Create structure in your garden with permanent paths. (Photo: mgnova.files.wordpress.com.)



Create a quiet spot in your garden for yourself. (Photo: i.pinimg.com.)

shape, size, or theme. When I think of garden “structure,” I mean that which you can easily see in the middle of winter. It is basically the permanent part of your garden; even if you rearrange your plants, structure remains. Paths can be well-worn foot trails comprised of pea gravel, flagstone, broken concrete, trails

of walkable ground cover, or just grass. The size of your garden, unless it is on your windowsill, is unimportant. What is important is trying to incorporate the trio previously mentioned: structure, function, and vision.

Most gardens have a “better” structure when the garden area is not completely flat. I like big mounds, irregular ground swells, boulders, rocks, and garden art to delineate and separate areas. “Garden art” can be formal weatherproof artwork or old rusty stuff like bicycles, tricycles, and wagon wheels. No right or wrong, just your preference. Perhaps you can mentally divide spaces easier if you think of garden structure as outdoor rooms—divided spaces can be “hints,” like a bench partially dividing one area from the other. That is my skinny on “structure.”

**Function**

Now for the “function” of your garden. Once again, this is a very loose interpretation. At the far end of “function” can be a ghastly and messy place for you to look at and complain about. I guess that works if complaining can be labeled a “function.” On the other hand, feeding birds and wildlife is a wonderful and generous garden function. (If you haven’t already, next year remember to leave some food in the garden for the winter birds.)

We had large grape and tomato crops this year. The grapes were too numerous to easily pick and the tomatoes ripened or did something weird, but the chickens and wild birds told me their treats are A-1

perfect. Great! So function can have many facets. I have mentioned two: a complaining focus and bird food.

Other functions are more likely a combination of several attributes. The garden feeds you, the birds, and your friends. Tending your garden is very meditative if you allow yourself to be present as you “work.” If you are designing your own garden from start to finish, allow for a “quiet” spot. If you move to an existing garden, see what you can rearrange in order to create a quiet spot. This is your choice of where and what, a formal or an informal quiet corner. For example, a log you can sit on that’s tucked into a corner works fine as a quiet spot.

Because my own garden is psychotically overlarge, it serves many functions. We feed the birds, etc., but I can also run around on the paths and not get my feet wet (my sweetheart’s idea), pick and share bundles of flowers, and take spring asparagus as a hostess gift. Those are just a few of my garden’s functions.

**Vision**

Lastly, do you have a vision for your garden? This can be as simple as wanting to grow grapes over a small metal arbor that originally was a “space divider.” Or it can be monumental, like planning a garden as a teaching place for a nearby school, a “smelling” garden for the visually impaired, or a learning space where all plants are labeled in Latin and common names. Wow, that could be a full-time endeavor!

Just enjoy your garden—it will love you back.

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