

Create a Landscape to Match Utah's Beauty

In my former days as a garden center employee, I was responsible for assisting customers in plant selection for their yards and helping them with some basic design. I know that designing a yard can be both difficult and overwhelming, and because of this it seemed, by default, that most would plant an extensive lawn and place a few kidney-bean shaped flowerbeds somewhere in the middle of the front yard. They would then plant a quaking aspen or two in the kidney bean and some flowers and then call it good.

This initially can look good, but this particular style has some major drawbacks. Because of the ability of lawn grass to overtake flowerbeds and the difficulty of removing it, many homeowners give up and eventually have a grass covered, kidney bean shaped humps in the middle of their front yard. To make matters worse, the main method aspens use to propagate is by sending runners from the main trunk to form a grove. These same runners also have a tendency to surface, and the combination of this with the grove makes playing sports and mowing very difficult and time consuming. A last item about aspens; they are susceptible to over 500 insect pests and diseases. Do not count on them living in your yard for more than ten to twenty years. They live much longer where they are native and are probably best left there.

Now that I have disenfranchised most residents that have a yard, one may ask what landscape style they should use. Although I am not an artist by any stretch of the imagination, one principle that has guided landscape designers around the world is to create styles that emulates a region's natural beauty. Unfortunately, the main landscaping style in Utah more closely matches that of England where profuse amounts of precipitation make dense forests and lush-grasslands features that define the British Isles.

Utah itself receives much less rainfall than most other areas but still has a natural beauty and distinctive feel that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. For example, the state is defined by wide open spaces that offer views that extends for miles and gives one a sense of how big the world is and how small we actually are. It is also defined by scenic valleys filled with wildflowers that are noticed only when one pays attention and picturesque mountain tops that act as an exclamation point proclaiming the uniqueness of the area.

Unfortunately many local residents do not appreciate this and assume sage brush is our only native plant and use it as an identifying symbol of Utah. If it truly was this, I would not want to use it in my yard either. However, one can use the above principles to aid them in creating a landscape that is equal to the beauty of the state. Some other things to consider include: if you have the budget, find local designers that have experience in designing landscapes different than that seen almost everywhere in the state, visit local garden centers and ask for native plants or those that are at least uncommon. Go camping or for a hike in a remote area and see how different the scenery is from what most homeowners yards look like. When one does so, it still may be difficult to come up with an overall design for your yard, but when it is finished, it will be beautiful and set Utah apart from anywhere else in the world.