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Photos: Vasco Celio

Jean Claude Defrance of Natura continues his guide to garden design, here focusing on the fundamental planning considerations when planting a new garden...

Every new garden should start with a plan. But remarkably, many homeowners begin not with a plan but a casual visit to the nearest garden centre, where an arbitrary selection of trees and plants is made. On returning home, inappropriate positions are often chosen for incompatible plant/tree combinations, with a lack of proper garden structure. So my first rule of gardening is: 'planning pays off!'

Planning pays off!

In my previous article (ClearView#3) I focused on the importance of addressing structure and layouts well before planting plans are considered. Here, I turn to the key factors for consideration when planning the planting of a garden.

A well-designed plan includes two key elements: structure, i.e. the physical layout and profile (including pool, driveway and terraces), and the planting plan - the placing of the major tree and plant elements.

Such a plan is vital, because unless you're prepared to face major upheaval



and significant costs in the future, there's only one chance to get the basics right - at the beginning! Too often homeowners want large trees planted or removed from positions impossible for a machine to reach; or an untidy, ill-kept slope near a pool to be restructured or terraced - almost impossible without destroying the pool and surrounding infrastructure. So it's essential to get the large elements of a new garden well-planned in advance - *photo A*.

Included in this category (along with terracing, walling, contouring and the planting of major elements) is the often neglected but vital factor of irrigation. Builders are generally oblivious to a gardener's needs and will happily lay concrete for terracing or pathways without a thought for the flower boxes to be placed on outside walls or pillars, or for the only irrigation route to a key section of garden. My second planning rule, then, is 'Get the irrigation in before the concrete!' - *photo B*.

Does a planting plan begin with the biggest items just because they are, generally, the most expensive? No. The real reason is that the biggest items - the trees - play the commanding role in any planting plan. Trees define a garden's focal points and its character and there should be at least one 'extra large' tree in every garden plan, no matter how modest the budget.

Better to spend available funds on one tree of good size than on several smaller trees that will take years to grow. At least one large tree will also redress the imbalance between the house and a newly-planted garden, and can break the dominance of a wall or roofline.

The choice of tree determines a garden's character. A large palm or cactus will set the tone for an exotic garden, a large olive tree a more Mediterranean style - *photo C*.





▲D This prompts my third rule: 'Choose one garden theme or the other - and stick to it!' - photo D. Exotic trees such as palms look best in exotic gardens. Mediterranean trees such as olives, pines or carobs look best

▼E when surrounded by indigenous or Mediterranean shrubs and plants, such as *lavandulas*, *rosmarinus* and *thymus*. The two themes rarely mix successfully en-masse, although it's perfectly possible to add highlights from one theme to the other. For example, a bougainvillea or two can enhance an otherwise all-Mediterranean garden.



Tree selection and placing should be done under the aegis of my fourth rule: 'Look to the future - five or ten years hence'. This may seem obvious, but it's often ignored. A small palm planted near a pool or cisterna will surely produce major problems from root growth in years to come, yet how commonly this occurs to many a house owner's regret - and cost.

In summary, a wise selection of trees gives stature and perspective to a new garden, provides focal points and welcome shade, balances the garden and house, blocks unsightly views, and will provide years of pleasure from the moment of planting.

So, we have drawn the plan, done the groundwork (terracing, stone walling, etc), mapped out beds, walkways, pergolas,

gravelled areas and flower boxes, installed the irrigation, and selected and positioned the big trees. Now we're ready for the planting of hedge, bushes, shrubs and ground cover - photo E.

So for my fifth rule of gardening: 'Always choose quality over quantity' - photo F. This is part of the 'spend wisely' philosophy that should apply to all planting. For example, ground cover presents a choice. Take the cheap option and choose fast-growing, easy-to-propagate species such as artotis and results will soon be apparent. Yet in no time at all there will be a constant demand for maintenance and cutting (not to mention the difficulties of complete removal). Alternatively, choose more expensive yet easier-to-manage indigenous species such as *helichrysum* or *rosmarinus*, and the results will be longer-lasting and much better value.

Similarly, cheap and fast-growing hedge such as myoporum will produce quick results, yet will demand frequent cutting whilst presenting a dull, uniform, straight-line look. Rather, choose a mixed-species, ecologically-friendly combination hedge that offers variety, shape and shelter for all manner of insects and fauna, so helping to maintain the balance of nature.

A garden built step-by-step on quality will endure, prosper - and give lasting enjoyment for years to come. ▼F



The 1-2-3 of garden planning

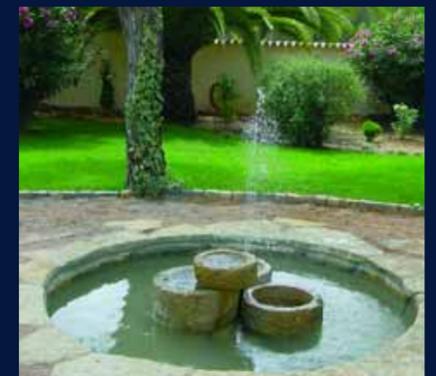
- 1 Make a properly considered plan.
- 2 Choose trees by size rather than by number.
- 3 Go for quality planting over quantity every time.



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