



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article

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Designing the Garden for Your Future

by Lydia Holley

It has been said, "When you are 16, you wonder how an old man of 30 manages to drag himself around. When you get to be 30, you feel that 60 is as old as Methuselah. When you get to be 60, you think that the 'aged' are those in their 90s."

It is best to remember that, with luck, we will all become elderly one day. Even if you are young and are just now starting your garden, a little forethought into designing your garden for your golden years may be much appreciated by your future self.

The design and future maintenance of tall plantings is important to consider. Try to keep the mature height to one story level or below of any plantings that might need to be pruned or hedged. That way, you will not have to climb a ladder to keep plantings maintained. I did not plan my garden well in this regard, and I am beginning to realize what a mistake I made. Used to be, it was easy for me to jaunt up to the top of a ladder, swinging pruners, electric hedge shears, chainsaw, or any other sharp tool that might cause bodily harm. Now, however, my hedges and climbing plants are getting trimmed shorter and shorter each year as I realize that it might not be in my best interest to take on such risk.

Thorny plants are another consideration. As skin gets thinner and more tender, scratches are more likely to tear the skin, causing scars and possible infection. I wish I would have thought of that before I planted so many plants with thorns and prickles, such as roses, pyracantha, barberry, hollies, and flowering quince (*Chaenomeles*). Curiosities such as the Wingthorn rose (*Rosa sericea ptericantha*) are interesting to have, but may not be the best choice for someone with skin that easily tears or bleeds.

Weed maintenance is always a consideration, but even more so as bending over for long periods of time becomes harder on your back. If weed removal is a top priority for you, try to plant ground covers that will shade out weed seeds, or keep a deep mulch applied. Of course, applying mulch is back breaking work, too. Perhaps failing eyesight will allow you to look past small areas of imperfection.

Pathways also need to be considered. If you find your footing is unstable on a gravel or flagstone pathway, you may want to consider replacing it before you fall. There is no perfect path material, however. Footing is sure on concrete, but should you fall, it is hard and unforgiving. A pathway made from a thick layer of mulch will need to be replenished regularly. Grass is soft, but will need to be mown, and can be slippery when wet.

Gardens are made for enjoyment. To enjoy your garden for as long as possible, think about your garden's design, its plants, pathways, and maintenance, and what each will mean for you in the future.



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