

# GARDENERS' DIRT

Victoria County Master Gardener Association



## LANDSCAPE TEXTURE:

### An element of design

**By Linda Lees**

Victoria County Master Gardener

#### CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Pansies take center stage with a repeat pattern that is impressionistic. The rock border and other plantings create a pleasing variety of texture at Four Seasons Nursery.**

Once upon a time a young refinery worker had one too many before heading home. It was dark when he stumbled into the bedroom, removed his clothing and dived into bed. A woman screamed and the lights came on. Then he screamed. He was in the wrong house.

The school librarian he had startled, called the police and he was arrested. He had pulled into the wrong cul-de-sac. He pointed out their two houses looked the same, right down to the barren front yard.

It is unlikely that he would have spent that night in jail if the woman had locked her doors, or if both of them had known about the importance of landscape texture, particularly in a subdivision where all the streets look alike.

#### Texture often ignored

The lesson to this true story is that texture is a major feature of the home landscape and horticulture design. Texture helps add individuality. Even so, it is something many people pay little attention to much less fully understand.

#### What is texture?

According to Webster's Dictionary one of the definitions of the word "texture" is "the visual or tactile surface," and "the characteristic and appearance of something." Texture can be the "basic scheme or structure." To be more precise, what is being addressed here has nothing to do with actual touch, but it is the brain's interpretation of what the eye views.

One of the best descriptions of texture appears in Cheryl Beesley's "Landscaping with Edible Plants in Texas." This book is dedicated to introducing edibles in home flower beds and containers. She wrote that texture for the designing gardener can be divided into two categories: The "bold" and the "fine."



### **CONTRIBUTED PHOTO**

**The contrast in size and shape with the foliage in this photo makes the cute little chicken all the more interesting.**

Tall and big leafed plants that usually make a strong statement are “bold.” Whereas small leafed, fine-textured plants like dill or frilly ferns have a light, airy look and represent the “fine” element. Another example of “fine” would be a closely packed bed of pansies of the same color.

“Bold textured plants,” Beesley wrote, “can be used for a number of purposes; as intermediate punctuation in a formal or modern garden, a frame to draw the eye to a particular element, and a counter to fine-texture plantings. A stand-alone plant can serve as an anchor or specimen in the garden.”

The eye is drawn to the bold plants, but it is the “fine” plants that “is a binding agent” for the overall design. Plants like various grasses offer a soft background and furthermore when planted in masse they take center stage.

### **Curb appeal and texture**

When it comes to curb appeal the use of varying textures is almost mandatory. The overall presence of selected, often diverse plants gives the viewer a sense of visual tactile impressions that demands appreciation. Yet the smaller, more elegant looking additions like sedum are usually at the forefront and sometimes can lend an almost whimsical impact while blending everything together.

Gardeners can also add texture with layers of tall trees, small shrubs and spiraling junipers, while graveled walkways, large rocks and even bare tree stumps add non-living elements. These additions may be enhanced when surrounded by “fine” ferns, grasses and vines.

Another way to establish texture is through contrast of shape. Too much of the same shape, like a horizontal line of boxy shrubs can be boring. Installing contrasting groups of shapes like hydrangea and ferns will bring about a visual

## **The learning never ends**

Much can be learned by reading landscape books and gardening magazines, while not forgetting to seek advice from local nurserymen and fellow gardeners. Taking notes of visually striking properties is just as important. It is an exciting, creative learning process that never ends.

*The Gardeners' Dirt is written by members of the Victoria County Master Gardener Association, an educational outreach of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension – Victoria County. Mail your questions in care of the Advocate, P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77901; or [vcmgga@vicad.com](mailto:vcmgga@vicad.com), or comment on this column at [VictoriaAdvocate.com](http://VictoriaAdvocate.com).*

## **REFERENCES:**

Beesley, C. "Landscaping with Edible Plants in Texas"

Garden Gate Magazine

"The Garden Idea Book"