Hellstrips: Beauty on the Boulevard

1. What is a Hell Strip/Parking Strip? No Man's (Plant's) Land
   a. **Dry** areas get little to no water (far from the hose) and lots of sun or dense shade with tree roots.
   b. Subject to **pollution** – usually related to auto traffic
   c. **Compacted** soils get considerable foot traffic and drain winter water events slowly.
   d. **Lawn** – The default solution. Weedy, overgrown or summer dormant – alternatives like fleur-de-lawn or stepables (creeping thyme, blue star creeper, etc)
   e. Usually the last area to be considered in the landscape.

2. How do we deal with it? Low Maintenance, Sustainable, Year-round Interest.
   a. Improve the soil – Improve the drainage – Better air circulation – Leads to healthier plants.

      Know your **soil type**. It is directly related to **Soil Fertility**: Clay (Nutrient rich - Acid soils may make certain nutrients unavailable), Sandy (very low fertility), Rocky (fine for plants, but not so easy to plant in) etc. Rub your soil between your fingers: Is it gritty? Sand. Is it sticky? Clay. Does it fall apart in clods? Getting closer to what we're looking for. Rain compacts soils in winter and leaches nitrogen essential to plant growth. Leaner plants (Cotoneaster, Blue Fescue, Herbs) are easier to maintain in Hellstrip areas.

      1) **Compost** – Dig water and nutrient holding organics deeply into the soil: Compost, Worm castings, Leaf mould, Hop mash, Manure and well-composted sawdust from farms, bagged planting mixes. Happy, well fed soils make happy plants! Bark Chips from arborists used as sheet composting for future planting.

2) **Gravel/Pumice** – Not sand! Clay + Sand = Concrete. Incorporate lots of it into the soil to improve drainage for rock garden type plants like Penstemons, New Zealand natives, Mediterranean herbs. Use it on top of the amended soil to improve drainage around the crowns of the plants, where they most often fail. (Crown rot)

b. How **wide** is the area? You may want to plant a **tree**. Is it under telephone wires? Check with city forester for permit restrictions. Allow for **circulation** and other traffic or storage uses.

1) Minimum of 18" wide gravel, stone or concrete pavers to **step out of cars**, all along potential parking areas

2) **Allow walk-thru** access from road to sidewalk at most likely parking intervals.

3) Remember to leave some landing pad for the **trash cans and recycle bins.**

4) Make sure visitors can freely **open their car doors** without damaging your plants

c. **Incorporate visually** with surrounding areas/ the rest of the landscape, adjacent lots. Hell or not, it is your property as much as your backyard. Use it to enhance your views from inside the house, screen undesirable views, or create a mood for passersby using the sidewalk (public area).

1) Group plants with similar needs together. Garden according to desired look and **habitat** requirements. (Think prairie) Incorporate natives for water conservation.

2) If area is wide enough (4' or wider) consider **mounding** up planted areas to make walking uncomfortable and to keep the public off. Areas 2' wide and under should have low

plantings with occasional taller accents if desired. Plant your trees on the other side of the sidewalk, where they have room to grow while providing shade.

3) Take advantage of **shared views** – landscape across the street, hedge or trees of neighbors, view of your house from the street

4) Beware of overcrowding – too many tall plants on either side of the sidewalk may feel **claustrophobic**. Try to space them out along one side then the other. Low growing plants help with driver visibility when approaching the street from driveway.