

TIPS FOR DESIGNING BACKYARD HABITATS

Plan-it Earth Design * 503-239-0105 * Amy Whitworth

- **TAKE INSPIRATION FROM NATURE** — Consider the layers in nature: Overhead canopy of trees, understory shrubs and groundcovers. Organize low growing plants in irregular drifts of 3 or more of the same variety. Accent with taller individual specimens. Space plants irregularly and limit the number of varieties within a small area. Don't forget soil health – it supports life of its own and is the key to healthy plants! Don't feed your plants, feed your soil.
- **PLANT ACCORDING TO HABITAT** — Plants look best and are easiest to maintain when planted among others that grow under the same conditions. Include native plants from the Pacific Northwest. Explore native cultivars with ornamental interest along with plants from other parts of the world with similar climates. Allow plants to grow with enough room to reduce the need for trimming.
- **EMPHASIZE PLANTS WITH MULTI-SEASON INTEREST**— Winter color of leaves and twigs, evergreen aspect, long blooming perennials, contrasting color of new growth, showy berries and seeds, interesting bark or foliage textures. Especially important for small properties, and areas seen from inside the house. Your garden has to look good to you as well as to the birds, bees and butterflies.
- **PROVIDE FOR THE NEEDS OF WILDLIFE** — Food, Shelter from predators and extreme weather, Water to drink and bathe in, and a safe place to raise young. Know your local wildlife and their preferred food and homes. Remember to provide host plants for butterflies. Adjust your thinking regarding garden pests: allow the food chain to do its work. Eliminate or reduce lawn along with chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Take a Naturescaping class. Certify your backyard as a wildlife habitat at www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat.
- **LET YOUR GARDEN DESIGN ITSELF** — Allow your problem areas to suggest types of gardens; boggy and rocky areas become places for specific plants. Insects become food for frogs and bats. Disconnect your downspout into a bioswale and create a new type of habitat. Take advantage of neighboring views and make them look like a part of your garden design. Acknowledge your circulation patterns: make sure you have adequate access to doors and hose bibs, ample room for moving to and from the car, easy to reach bicycle storage, wheelbarrow access through the garden and to the compost pile.
- **USE FOCAL POINTS** — Direct attention where you want it by arranging beautiful plant combinations, placing a water feature or bird bath, lining a path with rocks or mossy logs, or including a piece of sculpture. Create views that will hold your attention and draw you into the far reaches of your property while distracting you from less inspiring views.