

Form and pattern

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The size and shape of planting areas are basic to the success of planting. A good starting point is to get the relative proportions of planting and grass, or planting and paved surface right. Either grass or paving can make an attractive foil to planting. What makes a good foil is a material with visual simplicity that complements and supports the richness of the planting. You may also simply need access to the garden for maintenance and to the outside of buildings.

Because of its visual softness, grass can occupy bigger areas than paving without looking bleak, but too much open grass without some definition and enclosure does give a sense of emptiness (rather than spaciousness). There are many locations where paving is needed because of the intensity of use and the extent of planting area that would be ideal may not be available. But we can still create a mass of vegetation in balance with the area of hard surface - what matters is not necessarily the relative proportions of ground areas, but the proportions of the visible foliage to paving to be seen from usual angles. Planting trees and larger shrubs and using climbers and trailers to clothe vertical surfaces can maximize this 'visual area' of foliage.

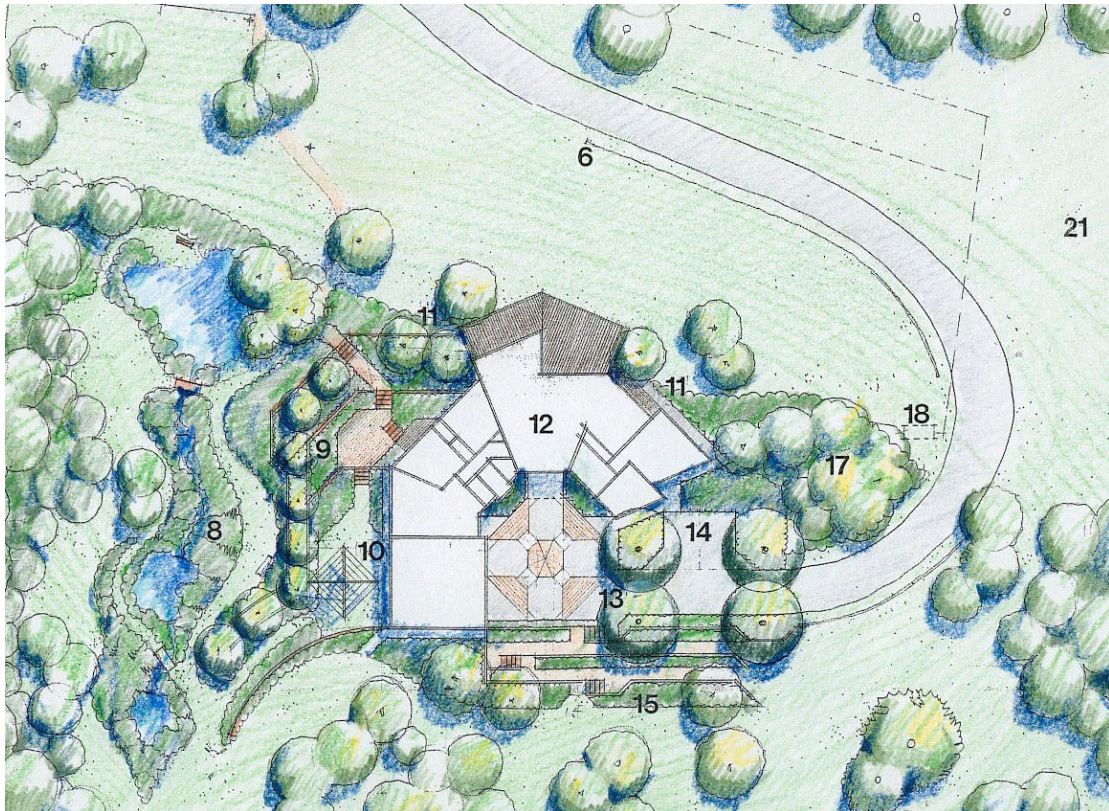
The second thing to ask about layout is what shape should planting areas be? This may be dictated by the geometry of buildings or boundaries- A very rectilinear building layout might be echoed in the layout of the planting or it could be contrasted with curving or naturalistic planting shapes. Whatever the relationship, it is always important that planting is integral part of the overall landscape design. So, if the shapes of planting contrast with buildings and walls they should still be chosen quite deliberately to relate to these other shapes. In some cases, the shapes of planting areas might be the dominant pattern form of the space and the building may take the lead from the planting. The two plans illustrated below show how Landscape Architect Ian Jakeway has beautifully integrated the shapes of planting, paving, decks etc.





One quality in popular demand is planting's ability to 'soften' the precise outlines and manufactured construction materials of urban structures. It does this by varied colours and textures of foliage and by the sinuous and irregular natural forms of shrubs and trees. These organic shapes are the result of natural plant growth and so there is no need to copy them in the outlines of planting areas in order to complement and contrast with geometric construction elements. Actually, nothing looks quite as contrived as a slavishly irregular wavy outline to an ornamental planting bed. It is wrong to use curvilinear form, but it should be shaped with conviction and be the right scale so that you can see the general shape's outline after the planting has matured.

The part of a design plan below (one of my designs) deliberately contrasts controlled geometry with seemingly spontaneous natural scatterings of plants both trees and shrubs



The way that the edges of beds and borders are made affects the character and quality of the design as a whole. Where a planting edge adjoins a lawn, it is common to see the grass edge laboriously clipped and trimmed, or the orange line of sprayed grass. This is done for the sake of neatness and easy cultivation, but makes in a stiff appearance and gradual reduction of the grass area through continuous spraying or trimming back of the edge. The most convenient way to edge a lawn and planted border is with a mowing strip of paving material such as brick, concrete or stone. This is a classic feature that facilitates maintenance and allows plants to spread without mowing damage. It also gives a crisp line to the edge of the grass and allows the designer more precision in its layout. With a paved mowing edge, a lawn can be laid out and maintained in angular and precise geometric shapes, including precise curves.

By far the most vulnerable parts of beds and borders are the corners. Frequent trampling of angular corners is inevitable in public places and also happens in private gardens. The least intrusive way of reducing the problem is to give corners either gentle radii or generous splays to avoid sharp corners. Even these more gradual corners should only be planted with resilient plants.

Many houses especially in warmer climates have roof eaves and overhangs. These are often about 600 mm wide from the wall because this is the ideal protection from summer sun whilst allowing access and passive heating from the lower winter sun. These cause a rain shadow so it is important, if you are planting in these areas, to make sure that the planting bed or garden extends well beyond the eaves where it can collect rain water. This water then migrates through the soil and planting can make use of it even though little falls directly on the planting.

Minimum widths of planting are worth a word. You do see very narrow strips of planting in the tops of walls and the base of buildings and between driveways etc. These are stressful places for plants to grow, and only those with special adaptations will survive in the long run. In the top of walls the small amount of soils is so vulnerable to drought that it needs succulents or plants that cope with drought in other ways such as season growth. At the base of walls the plants are likely to have very little topsoil due the foundations of both walls and the paving both of which usually extend out beyond the surface structure, so the

plants to grow here must like a really restricted root run (e.g. some palms, pohutukawa, fig, etc), between paths and driveways not only is the amount of topsoil very little but the plants are likely to get trampled or driven over – a particularly unpleasant kind of stress for plants. Not many plants can put up with being regularly squashed but some are more tolerant than others, these include *Coprosma* 'Hawera' and *Grevillea* x *gaudichaudi*. Always avoid soft or large leaved plants in these situations.