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The suburban home of this period was set closer to the ground with less foundation showing on a larger lot of 7,000 or more square feet. These suburban homes had a great deal of planting area around them with room for flowers or vegetable gardens in the rear. The American suburban home of the mid-thirties had a wide variety of modern architectural planning and design features comparable with most of today's houses except for the split-levels. The exterior architectural appearances were varied and derived from a great number of styles such as English, Colonial, Spanish, Georgian, or a mixture of these in an American Style.

Most of the circumstances which led to the development of the foundation planting as described in the preceding paragraphs have changed, but the practice of planting the front of houses lingers on. In general, the high foundation is gone from today's houses, but the planting is still there. This method of planting does not meet today's need. However, it is a custom that will die slowly with the landscape nurserymen and home gardener. Eckbo, in his book *Landscape for Living*, stated: "Foundation-planting; that great technique for moving miscellaneous nursery stock purports to 'tie the building to the ground, soften it, conceal the scars,' etc." Landscaping is very apt to be sold as beautification which may cover up damage to nature or mistakes of architects or builders.

The professional literature has been full of references that criticize the concept of the foundation planting. In 1935, Bottomly wrote: "The continuous foundation planting is wrong mainly because it is overdone and because the connecting plants are so high and so positive as to destroy the effect of the functional plants at the entrances and corners." Writers on landscape, in general, have said the only reason for any form of foundation planting should be used to soften the lines of the building and help blend the building into the surrounding landscape.

One way suggested to focus attention on any fault in a foundation planting was by taking a picture of the front of the house, framing it and hanging it over the fireplace. If something was wrong, the problem would show up easily, since, generally, tall shrubs should be planted at the corners of the house to soften harsh lines and create a transition to the landscape and some accent be made at the doorway. The old practice of accenting the doorway was simply to plant six spireas each side of the front door.

Landscape architects writing for the benefit of the home gardeners mentioned there were more poor examples of foundation plantings in America than any other type of planting. They were critical of the many reasons given for using foundation plantings such as fitting the house to the surrounding area, or harmonizing the vertical lines of the building with the horizontal lines of the ground. Other reasons listed to justify foundation planting were to soften the lines about the house or to accentuate or decorate. These were all worthy purposes, but the landscape critics questioned how much softening or harmony there was in the monotony of stiffly spotted evergreens or



Porches moved to the side or rear of the house, but the plants remained as before.

deciduous shrubs planted around a building. One recommendation was to forget about the foundation planting entirely as the major reasons for its existence had passed into oblivion. What it does is set the house on a ruffle of fluffy foliage, or if the plants have been sheared the house sits on an Alice in Wonderland set of machine-like cubes, spheres, and pyramids.

In any discussion on the good or bad features of foundation plantings, it is the house which must be considered the most conspicuous object in the landscape. Plants are one of the elements in the landscape that best create the harmony between the ground area and the building. The foundation area is where plants can be located to create this harmony.

There is no reason to completely encircle a house with a continuous mass of shrubbery unless the house has an ugly foundation. High foundations of stone or brickwork are often attractive, at least in part, and can add a pleasant view if made visible. With today's architecture, whether modern or traditional in style, standard construction brings the facing material (wood, brick, etc.) to within 6 inches or so of the ground, showing little or no foundation, so there is even less need for foundation planting.

The criteria for a good foundation planting may be that it should never call attention to itself; felt, but not necessarily noticed, so that the facade of the house will be accented to harmonize with the entire landscape development. Too often the opposite is seen where the foundation planting becomes a collection of plants with different shapes, contrasting textures, exotic colors of foliage and flower, as though the plants are being grown for the sole purpose of cultivating a small arboretum.

The foundation planting should not be treated as a separate unit of the landscape, but as part of the entire house and garden design. Perhaps it would be better to forget about the foundation planting and consider the overall setting of the house, its background and foreground, and the ground area as one unit. When this happens, the plantings about the walls of the foundation will be less prominent, with fewer varieties and quantities of plants, so that attention is directed to the house rather than the planting. Today, houses have attractive walls that can be enhanced with shrubs, not concealed, and the landscape is supposed to be lived in, not just to be looked at.

The contemporary approach to foundation

planting is to treat it as part of the total planting design, not as a separate unit. At one time, plantings in front yards were designed to be viewed as a picture to be seen while walking or traveling by in a car or carriage. Today, the front yard should be considered, not as a picture, but rather as a space for people to use — a part of the entry to the home.

Some authors have suggested a number of simple rules as guides in solving design problems of the foundation planting. These rules included planting corners; doorways of the home; suggestions on shapes, widths, and lengths of planting beds; and selection of plants to fit the building and environment. (How do you design a set of rules that can apply to all styles of architecture and house?)

Part of the problem we have today in residential planting design is the application to all types of architecture of a concept developed years ago for a single type of architecture. We no longer build houses with high foundations, but the same type of planting is still placed in front of colonial, cape cod, (which authentically would have no foundation planting) ranch, or split level houses.

The use of plants in foundation planting to create a transition from the building to the ground or to accentuate, decorate, and soften the harsh lines about the house, etc., have been primarily thought of as the artistic part of planting design one of sim-

plicity, scale relationship, balance, sequence, and focalization.

More important is the functional role of plants to solve environmental and aesthetic problems in the landscape. Contemporary planting design uses the functional spectrum of plants which includes architectural, engineering, climate control, and aesthetic use of plants.

Architecturally, plants can be used to form walls, canopies, or floors by taking advantage of their different growth habits and foliage characteristics. They can be used to define or articulate a space, provide privacy, screen an unpleasant view, or reveal or frame a significant view or object.

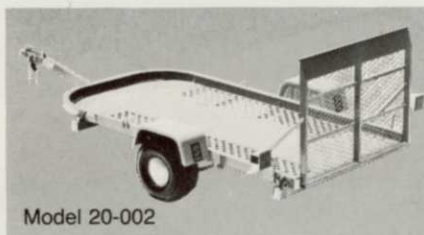
Plants used for engineering purposes can reduce the glare of lights, or create a better traffic pattern for movement of people and cars. The engineering spectrum of plants can also include sound control, air-conditioning, and erosion control to mention just a few.

The climate control spectrum might use deciduous shade trees to screen the hot sun or in winter, to permit the sun to penetrate to the ground. Plants used in climate control can act as windbreaks, increasing or decreasing wind velocities and directions, can reduce the impact of precipitation, and can change solar radiation levels.

Continues on page 75

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Plants have been used traditionally for beautification (aesthetics). This has unfortunately been considered the major or only reason for plantings around buildings by most people.

Aesthetically, plants can become a piece of living sculpture, as when placed against a wall to give an interesting shadow pattern of branches. They can be used as a background for other plants, or to help blend together unrelated objects, buildings, or structures. They provide an environment for birds and wildlife and enhance our surroundings. An important aspect of aesthetics often overlooked is the impact on senses other than sight - smell - touch and hearing. Examples might be the sound of the winds in the pines, the scent of a linden grove in spring or the feel of new clover on a sunny hillside.

An alternative to foundation planting can be to design the front yard as a public access area in such a manner that visitors or family pass from the public street to a doorway garden designed to suggest a degree of enclosure and a sense of arrival. The passage from street to door can be through trees, shrubs, fences, hedges, flowers, and over surfaces of pavement, grass or ground cover designed as a door-yard garden providing a feeling of separation from the street to the privacy of the home and all in the name of foundation planting.

The planting for the front yard becomes an extension of the entryway of the house and in some ways part of the living room. It is at the point of entering the lot or front yard where the preparation begins for the social interchange which later takes place within the house. For example, in years past, some religious shrines were located within a beautiful woods setting. The walk through the woods prepared the worshipper for meditation and prayer. Likewise, the walk from the car to the house should be a time of preparation for the social interaction or activity that is going to happen inside the home. If the transition from the street and automobile is a comfortable and pleasant experience for the pedestrian, then guests will feel more comfortable and pleasant once inside the home. On the other hand, if the transition from street to house is not pleasant, the guest may subconsciously have an unfavorable attitude about the host and surroundings.

Good planting design thus considers the front yard, not just foundation planting, and relies heavily on the functional spectrum of plants. The landscape design process is used to create the kind of entry place or front yard we want and will result in the use of plants, pavements, and structures. Pattern, textures, scale and form of these elements (plants, pavements, and structures) must be considered in the development of

the design. We can create that certain feeling of privacy, personality, or sense of place we want our yard to express. However, certain environmental and space design problems must be solved by considering the functional spectrum of plants and applying the five design principles: simplicity, balance, scale, sequence, and focalization. Examples of apply-

Continues on page 78

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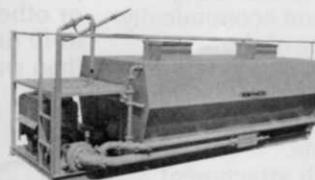
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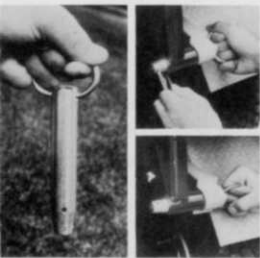
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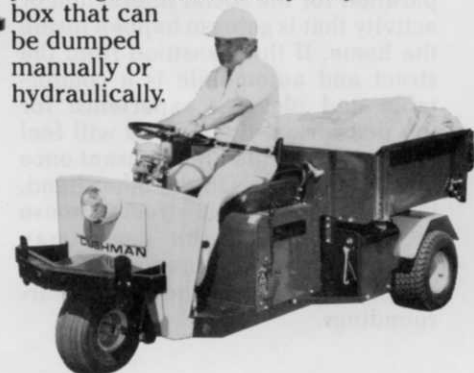


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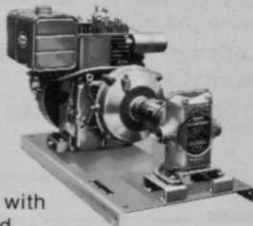
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Foundation

from page 75

ing the design principles might include:

Achieving focalization through the use of specimen plant, metal or wood sculpture, a light, the seasonal interest of flowers or foliage changes of autumn.

Achieving scale by creating walks which are wide enough for the use and space, fences which are the right height or plant masses which relate properly to the entire width of the space.

Achieving balance by considering the relationship of a large oak to another oak or to two or three small trees so that volumes are roughly equivalent.

Each planting design is unique and must be developed for the style and lines of the building, its materials and colors, and equally important, for the people who live there. The selection of plants should be based on whether or not the plant fits the design, not upon the individual characteristics of the plant. It is more important to know what is needed in a plant, and then find the plant that fits those needs, not vice-versa.

Modern day planting design attempts to integrate plants and architecture with the surrounding environment by allowing those things which need dominance to become focal and those things that are subordinate to fit into the background where they are appropriate. Even though the architecture has an important place in the development of the landscape design, it may be necessary to forego architectural dominance in order to create a solution that will make the program work. A building with excellent architectural features actually needs very few plants to accentuate its characteristics. However, to accomplish the design needs of the total property, a great many plants and structures might be necessary.

If on the other hand, one has a structure which is not architecturally pleasing, it may be necessary to use many plants to draw attention away from the architecture, by making the landscape dominant. However, if the program requires a very simple solution, it may be necessary to live with a highly visual dominant architectural element because of the nature of the needs and how one wants to develop the site. **WTT**

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