LANDSCAPING

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One definition of a weed is that it is a *plant out of place*. Such a definition is very appropriate for overgrown landscapes. This may occur only 5 to 10 years after installation. There are as many homes over landscaped as there are homes which are under-landscaped or poorly landscaped. An attractive home without plants or hidden by a forest is undesirable. **Designing a landscape** is the **art of making the best use of available space in the most attractive manner**. Small areas require proper planning more than larger areas. The planning process requires anticipation of needs to be filled by plants and hardscape (statues, benches, walks, etc.). Selection, placement and culture of ornamental plants in the landscape requires a knowledge of plants and what can be expected from them.

A well planned landscape involves more than randomly placing a few trees for shade, a row of shrubs along the house foundation and a couple of taller bushes at each corner. Each landscape should mirror the needs and tastes of the principle user. For this reason there is a great deal of latitude in determining what is correct. However, there are many things that can be done to compliment the structure and natural terrain.

Use of trees, shrubs and turf in residential and commercial landscapes is important for more reasons than beautification of property. In addition to softening harsh lines of construction, plants can be used effectively to:

- Direct traffic
- Prevent erosion
- Divert cold winter winds away from heated structures
- Shade structures or outdoor areas from the blazing summer sun
- Create the feeling of depth in small areas, attract wildlife
- Screen unsightly areas.

Before you begin the process of drawing a landscape plan, it is important that the area be considered in **three different ways**. **First**, think of the lot as a cube. Property lines are walls, trees or sky make up the ceiling and the ground is the floor. **Next**, think of the outdoor area as an extension of each room within the house. It is necessary to pay special attention to major living areas and keep in mind the multi-seasonal appeal of landscape plantings. **Finally**, consider the view of others onto your property and your view of other areas. There may be a need to screen areas for your privacy or to screen unsightly areas. Throughout this process it is necessary to keep in mind that the landscape plan should help the house blend with the remainder of the area.

Drawing a plan may seem like the first step. In order to know what to put into the plan a *list must first be made of all needs and wishes of the residents*. List them all. Some may be out of the question now due to cost; others limited due to lack of space. If there is a possibility they will be added in the future, now is the time to plan for them. Divide these up among use areas such as:

- Service area for garbage
- Play area for children
- Parking
- Outdoor living area (patio, deck, etc.)
- Tool/equipment storage
- Access routes

You may also want to include an area for:

- Sunning
- Reading
- Sports
- Gardening
- Formal entertaining

Some of these uses may be able to share the same space.

The design process necessitates having an accurate scale drawing of the property with all existing plant material above ground and buried utilities and septic systems located on the plan. Make a note of all grade changes and desirable or undesirable views. Arrows indicate views from areas where they will be seen.

Lay a piece of tracing paper over the drawing and begin making circles to indicate major use areas. Activities that require a separate area should be noted as well as those able to share the same area. As walk-ways and beds are laid out keep in mind three ways in which property should be viewed: a cube, an extension of indoor areas and views into or out of the property.

Once a satisfactory arrangement is worked out, it is time to begin placing plant forms into the plan. Specific plants should not be used at this point. Later, specific plants are matched to plant forms. Trees, shrubs and ground covers should emphasize desirable architectural lines and masses of the house. Pleasing vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines can be echoed by the form and branching pattern of certain trees and shrubs (Figure 7). Other plants can be used to soften harsh architectural angles, masses and materials (Figure 8). Plants can also be used to frame desirable views of the house. Sometimes the best view of a house is from the side. Selective framing allows the viewer to see only the best parts of the house and yard in a sequence that builds curiosity.

The human eye has a tendency to follow the outline of objects in the landscape. This affects the apparent size of a house. **Placing plants of increasing heights away from the house corners increases the apparent length of the house** (Figure 9). This is especially helpful with boxlike, two story structures. It is also useful on a smaller scale to emphasize and lead the eye to an entrance or window. Just the opposite effect occurs when large conical evergreens are placed on either side of an entrance giving it an uninviting, inhibiting appearance (Figure 10).

Foundation plantings became popular when it was necessary to hide exposed foundation walls made of less attractive materials such as concrete block. Foundations on newer homes are rarely exposed for more than 12 inches. This job is easily handled by a ground cover. Older homes often have attractive stone foundations that should be emphasized, not masked.

Plant material need not be limited to evergreens such as boxwood and *Taxus* (yew). Deciduous material can be used to unify the architecture through its branching pattern (i.e., horizontal house lines, horizontal branching pattern). These plants change throughout the seasons and add interest through an infinite variety of color and texture. They can do all of this without distracting from the main feature, the house.

Remember to consider growth habits and cultural requirements of plants you are considering. This is especially important for plants close to the house. Failure to consider the mature height and width of a tree can result in an overgrown, crowded appearance that dwarfs and hides the house. It is also important that soil, moisture, cultural requirements and disease and insect problems be recognized before the plant is purchased. Consult more than one source before making a final decision.

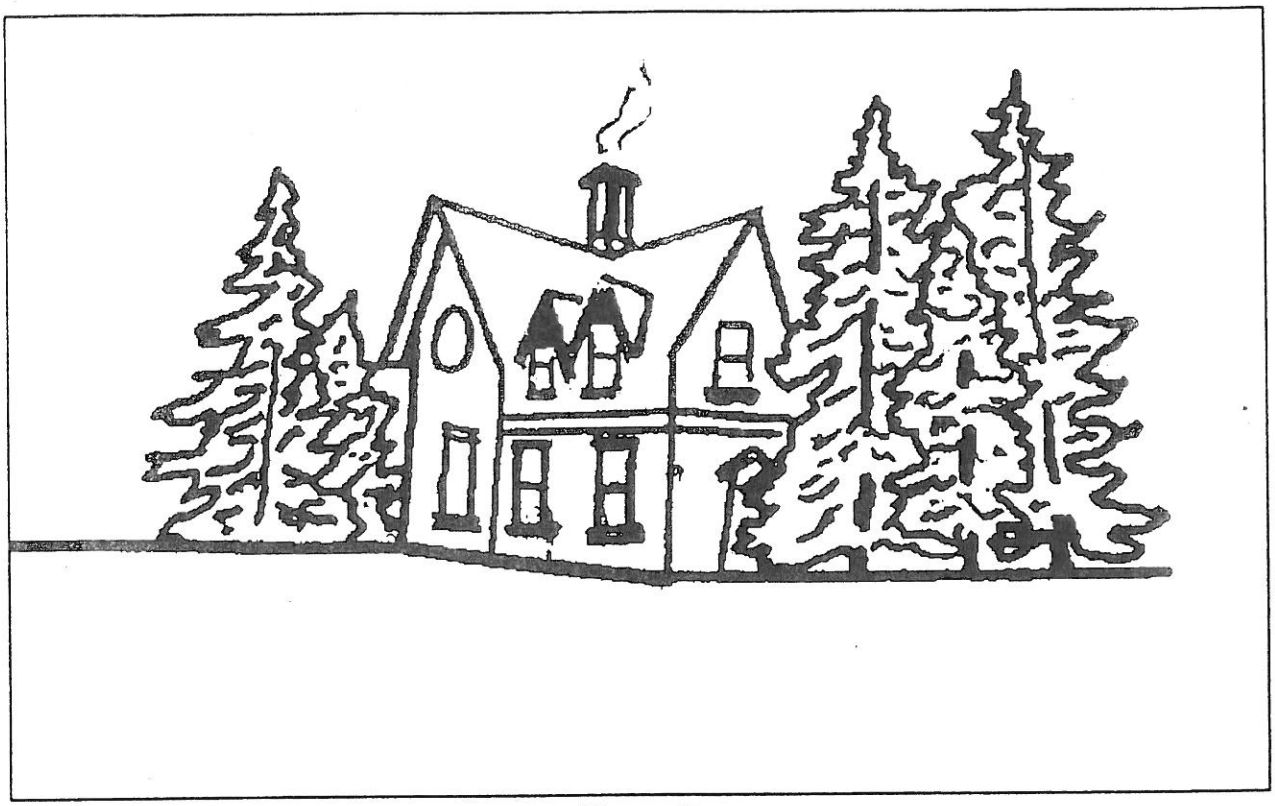

Figure 7

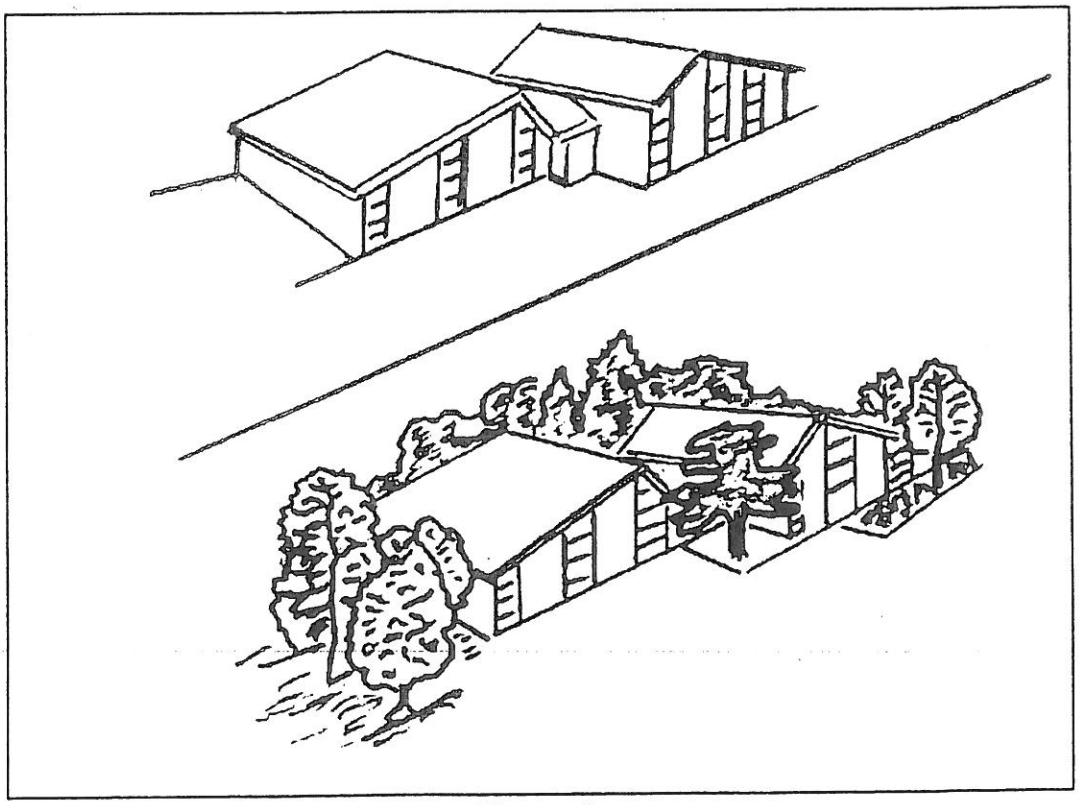

Figure 8

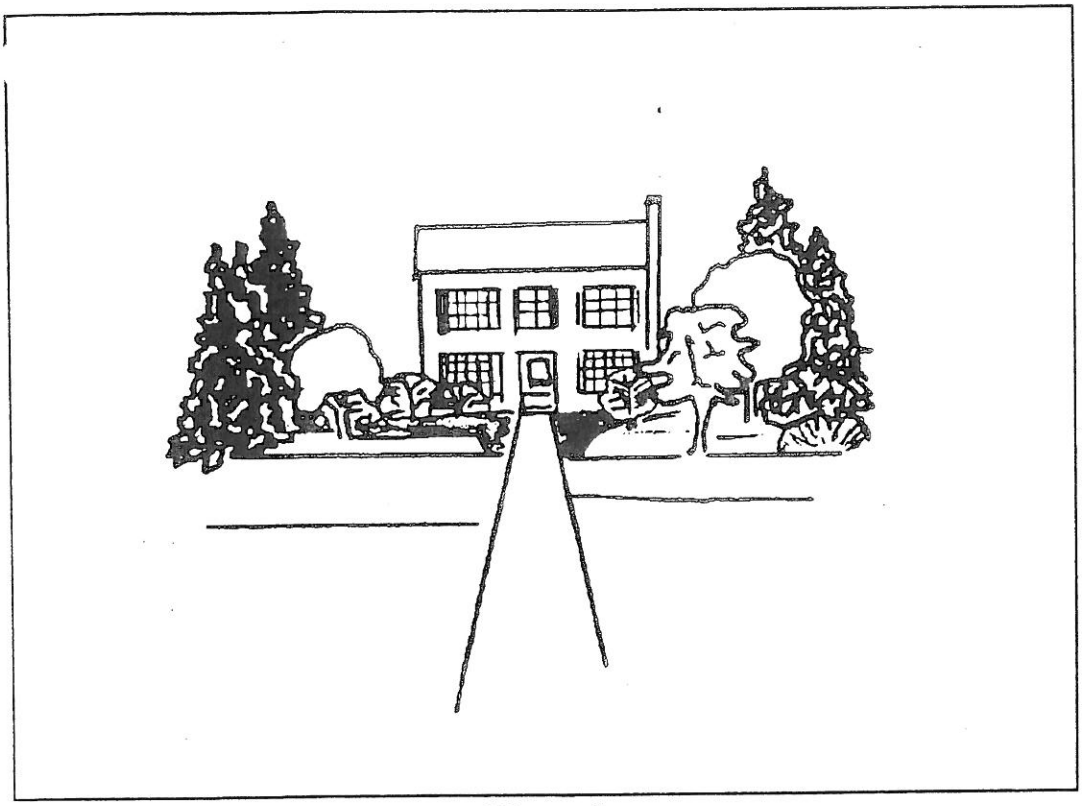

Figure 9

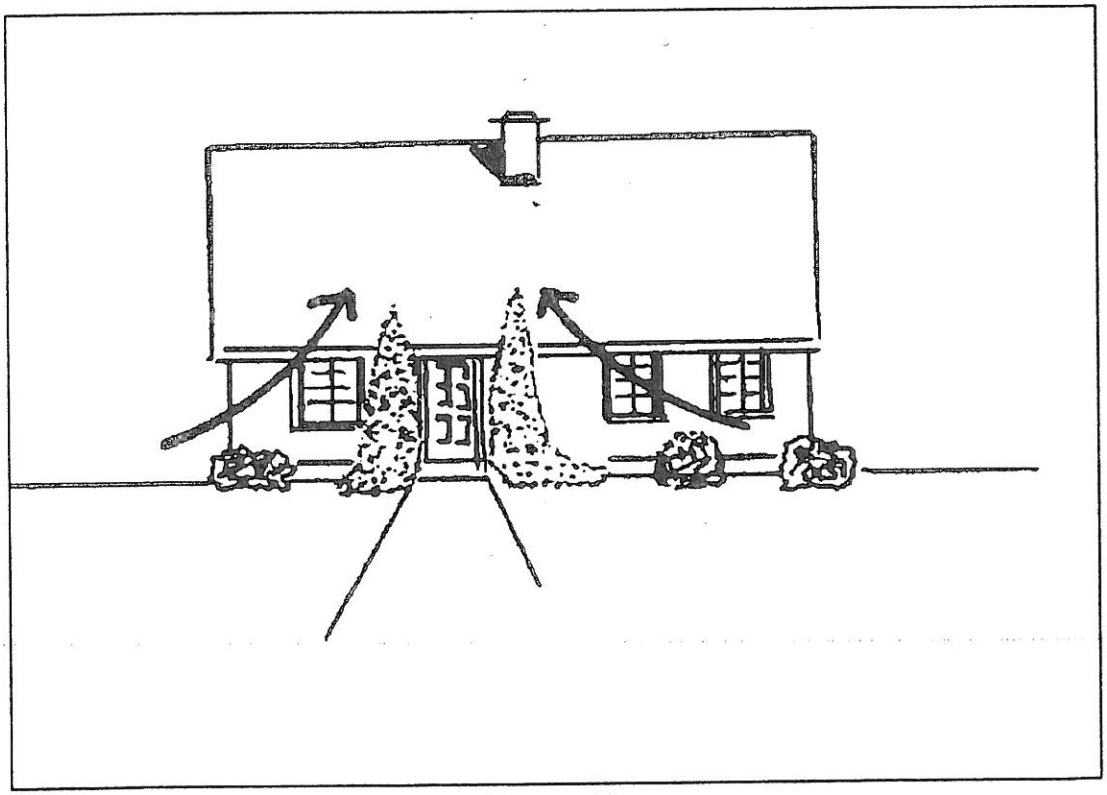

Figure 10