

# Your perfect landscape? Maybe not.

## BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES

One way to begin planning a new garden is to pin yourself down and examine what it is you want. This might sound easy enough, but how many times have we ended up guessing wrong about what we really wanted?

In the words of **Backyard Farmer** host Kim Todd, try starting with “I want to —“ rather than “I want a —“ when you consider your landscape. This change in perspective can help lead you to the yard you want rather than the yard you think you want, often saving time and money to boot.

For instance, if you’re thinking, “I want a row of columnar shrubs along my property line,” you might be better served by figuring out what you really mean by this—that is, what’s your underlying aim behind the shrub row? In this case, it might be “I want to maintain privacy between myself and my neighbor five feet away.”

This subtle shift from form to function often opens up more possibilities that otherwise would have been overlooked, which might be especially helpful in this situation, since columnar shrubs are typically slow-growing and expensive.

When approaching the project from the lens of achieving privacy, yes, the shrubs would work, but so might a vine-covered fence or a group of tall grasses. Now suddenly you have more options and can weigh them in terms of the money, labor and time involved. Additionally, you can determine how they would each help achieve any other goals you might have.

If you’re also thinking, “I want to make my own wine,” then a fence or trellis with grapes growing on it would address both desires at the same time. If instead of privacy you just want to mark your property line, then a whole different set of solutions applies; you could probably get by with a split rail fence or a well-placed tree.

Simply put, “I want to —“ helps you figure out why you want something, which can be incredibly enlightening. (How much of what we want is to keep up with the Joneses? Or to buy that thing we saw on TV?) Asking the right questions is a way to help us parse out our true desires.

Below are a few of the real questions that might be hidden behind the ones we actually ask.

When you say you want mums, do you mean you want fall color... in which case native asters, bluestar or ornamental grasses might offer longer seasonal interest, and bring in more butterflies.

If you want a playhouse for the kids, a low-limbed tree, logs or stones or a pile of dirt or mulch for them to play in might offer just as much fun.

Instead of a bluegrass lawn, a sedge meadow or no-mow groundcovers might be easier.

If you’re not wanting large-growing trees, is that because you want to avoid the damage or liability from falling limbs or expensive tree removal? Or are you wanting more sunshine, in which case small-leaved trees with filtered sunlight might work?

Oftentimes we think we want a hedge when what we really want is to mark off boundaries, which can be done with a planted berm, low trees or tall grasses—elements that can withstand the loss of one plant better than a row of shrubs that are all the same height.

Easier than building a pergola might be planting a tree or placing a bench for a good view. Instead of a high-maintenance fountain, maybe the real desire is for a focal point, nearby water or a way to attract birds and butterflies. In that case a dry creek, rain garden, sculpture or bird bath might offer the same advantages.

So what is it you want? It might be worth it to give it another thought.



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