

What I Want for My Yard

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum,
plantnebraska.org

“Whether or not the gardener is conscious of it, his garden cannot help but have a design, be it conventional or idiosyncratic, inherited or chosen. And that design is going to tell a story—about who you are, about your relationship to your neighbors on the one hand, and to the land on the other.” Michael Pollan



Whether we consciously think about it or not, we all “want” specific things from our yards, probably far more than we realize. Maybe we want it to look good, not take up too much of our free time, or maybe we want an outdoor living space where we spend a lot of time. Some people care about attracting birds, or how it looks from the street, or if we want privacy... how hidden and private it can be.

As part of the larger physical environment, we certainly want our yards to “do no harm,” and hopefully benefit ourselves, wildlife, neighbors and the larger ecosystem. Within those constraints, though, there are a lot of things that can be done to make our yards more appealing and usable.

As we enter another growing season, here’s a few things to consider:

- Are there places you want more shade? More sunlight? More privacy? If so, think about the best places to plant trees or shrubs.
- Are there views out windows that are particularly important where you want sun, shade or a focal point of some sort.
- If you have kids, are there specific things that would encourage outdoor play? Shade, structures, pathways, sand pits.
- Are there unused or not highly visible areas that could be kept rough for kids to dig, move soil or sand, plant or build simple structures.
- Are there plants you love that aren’t currently in your yard? Plants you’ve seen or have good memories of or that fit into specific interests—flowers for cutting, berries for eating, vines for covering.
- Do you want to attract birds, butterflies or other pollinators, possibly to increase vegetable or fruit production.
- Are there seasons when your current landscape is somewhat bare; particular plants that could provide more interest during those times.
- Are there pathways that would be helpful to create—regular routs to garbage cans, birdfeeders, compost.
- Do you have areas, amenities or interests that make you want to get outdoors—tables, chairs, shade, filtered sunlight.

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