

## GARDEN CHALLENGE

If your corner lot has too many trespassers and not enough privacy, here are some solutions. BY LORRAINE FLANIGAN



**C**ORNER LOTS CAN SUFFER DAMAGE from pedestrians (and their pets), and delivery and maintenance workers looking for a shortcut. Open to public view on two sides, corner lots also make it challenging to create privacy. To help you make the most of your corner, Wild At Heart Design's Sara Katz of Toronto and D.A. Gracey & Associates Ltd.'s Adam Gracey of Vaughan, Ont., explain what to consider when designing a corner landscape.

### **SURVEY PROPERTY LINES; CHECK MUNICIPAL REGULATIONS**

Establish the legal property lines to know what's yours and what belongs to the municipality. Some towns levy landscaping fees, Katz says, so find out whether permits are required.

It's also important to determine where utility service lines lie. On corner lots, these can lead from either side. Some cities offer toll-free numbers to provide this information, and will deploy work crews to mark the property. Katz also recommends checking with the municipality to see if any work is scheduled in the area and, if possible, delay the landscaping until it's completed.

### **MAKE CONNECTIONS**

On corner properties, you're not only designing a front and backyard, but a substantial side yard, too, Gracey says. The side of the house often

**TURNING  
THE  
CORNER**



has no door leading inside, and in this situation, he says, the challenge is to connect the side yard to the front and backyards as a way of providing access to the house, while developing the side yard into useable space. To accomplish this, Gracey suggests building a pathway from a private patio, lounge or dining area—even a dog run!—located in the side yard that leads through a gate, arbour or pergola to the front and back gardens.

#### ELEVATE

Although a fence or hedge provides the most privacy, Katz points out that changing the elevation is also an effective way to create a boundary between public and private spaces. Creating a berm, for example, is one method of raising the level of the landscape. Building a low, wide wall is another option—it could be as little as three feet (90 cm) tall with a flower border at its base on the street side, a built-in bench on the side facing the house and plantings on top.

#### DON'T FENCE ME IN

Solid fences provide the most privacy, but they often look harsh and uninteresting, and make the yard feel too enclosed. Katz suggests varying the heights of the panels to make the fence less imposing. It's also prudent to abide by municipal height bylaws, build the fence so that it's in scale with the size of the property and leave an unobstructed view for street traffic.

Fences can be made of a wide range of materials, including wood, bamboo, concrete block with a stucco finish, fieldstone or brick. Combining various materials creates interest and openness, but avoid using too many different types, Katz cautions. Inserting a wrought-iron panel or a lattice screen (minimum 4-inch/10-cm squares) into a wooden fence creates interest and some openness. Alternating fencing with plant material, such as a cedar hedge, is another good way to create an airy boundary.

For a family with young children, fences help keep them safely in the yard. But even in this situation, privacy and safety can be achieved by using a variety of materials, from frosted Plexiglass screens to weatherproof fabric panels in brightly coloured graphic designs. With some forethought, Katz says, the fence could be designed with removable panels, and as the children grow up, these can be replaced with lattice screens or hedging.

#### FIND BEAUTY IN THE DETAILS

It's also important that materials and colours for fences and other garden structures, such as pergolas and arbours, complement the house, Gracey says. For example, to coordinate with a Victorian home, an arbour or pergola could incorporate the same ornate detailing and colours that appear around the window and fascia trim. Alternatively, complement contemporary architecture with a steel-framed gate fitted with a smoked glass insert, for example.

"The idea is to play up these details to extend the face of the house into the surrounding landscape," he says.

#### BEAT AROUND THE BUSHES

Hedges can be as formidable as solid fences, especially if they're tall, thick and evergreen. "These can be useful in blocking the view from the street of any windows on the side of the house," Gracey says. When selecting evergreens, instead of planting spruces or other wide, spreading conifers, he prefers narrow, tightly planted cedars and hemlocks because they take up less valuable space.

Both Gracey and Katz like using deciduous shrubs as low hedges. Katz recommends dwarf lilacs and rugosa roses, and both of these pros favour

#### TRY THIS

#### Directing traffic


Cutting across an open expanse of lawn is all too tempting. Corner lots also offer twice as many access points for delivery and maintenance workers—and plenty of comfort stops for Fido. If unwanted traffic is a problem, designer Sara Katz offers these creative ideas.

- Build a path across the corner: instead of inviting more traffic, it provides a route for those who are determined to cut the corner whether there's a pathway or not, and spares your lawn or flowerbeds.
- Build a dry stone riverbed—river rock is difficult to walk on.
- Plant thorny shrubs such as barberies, rugosa roses and cotoneasters to deter passersby.
- Provide a "pee rock" for neighbourhood dogs to divert them from your plants.

ninebarks (*Physocarpus opulifolius*). In his designs, Gracey also uses burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*) for blazing fall colour, alpine currant (*Ribes alpinum*) for a quick-growing hedge and purpleleaf sand cherry (*Prunus × cistena*) for its colourful foliage.

For large properties, giant silver grass (*Miscanthus giganteus*) offers both privacy and dramatic beauty, and the plumes last all winter. For smaller yards, Katz recommends any of the hardy fountain grasses (*Pennisetum* spp. and cvs.). Tall perennials such as Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*) and bugbane (*Actaea* spp. and cvs., syn. *Cimicifuga* spp. and cvs.) can also be used to create airy screens.

Although it presents certain challenges, designing a corner lot offers many possibilities. "City property is valuable," says Gracey. "A well thought out plan makes use of every inch."

And while personal style and neighbourhood character should be taken into consideration, "Don't be afraid to shake it up a bit," says Katz. "Sometimes it's good to do something unusual—if you do it well, others may follow." 

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