

Foundation Plantings

When you mention the word "landscaping," most people immediately think of a foundation planting. To many, this is the most important part of the landscape development. Foundation plantings are important but can be overdone. Many homeowners think a house must be surrounded by a massive planting. However, massive plantings may no longer be necessary because of changing building techniques and home styles. Be careful not to over plant.

The objectives of foundation plantings are the same, no matter the size, style, or age of your house. Here are some objectives:

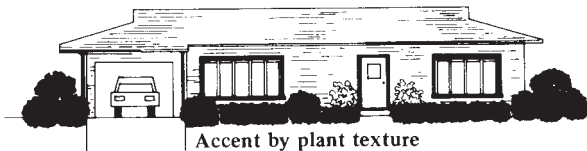
Accent the main entrance - Create accent by using plants and architectural details that attract the eye and hold attention. Accent plants should have interesting color, shape, or foliage texture. Architectural details such as light fixtures, door knockers, glass panels, carved doors, painted doors, and accented planters are frequently used to create an attractive entrance accent.



Accent by architectural detail



Accent by plant form



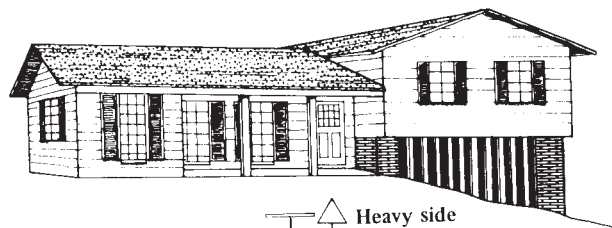
Accent by plant texture

Avoid competing elements - Competing elements can ruin the effectiveness of the accented entrance. Avoid using scattered plantings and specimen plants in the open lawn area. Often shrubs trained on walls and chimneys create very odd plantings that detract from the entrance.

Plant for visual balance - Study the appearance and style of your house. Imagine the entrance as a pivot point for balancing. The house may appear heavier on one side. The lighter looking side needs more massive plants to balance the visual weight of the heavy side.



Sides equal Sides equal
Asymmetrical balance



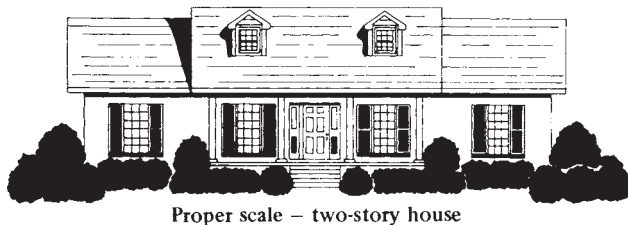
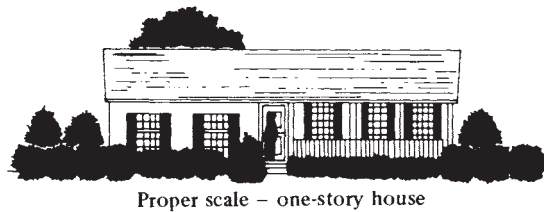
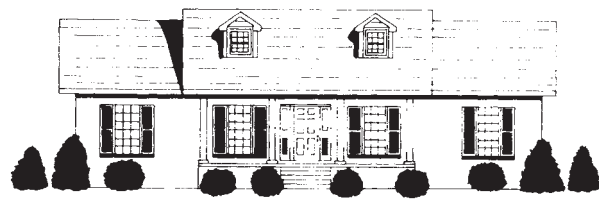
Heavy side
Not balanced



Sides equal Sides equal
Symmetrical balance

Avoid the congested, overgrown look - Use plants that are in scale with the height and width of your house. One-story houses and houses with tall, steep roofs can accommodate larger plants. In general, the foundation plant should be one-third to one-half the height from the ground to the bottom of the roof. Corner plantings may be slightly taller. The basic foundation planting has greater unity if it is a continuous planting. Individual and separate plants create a choppy effect as compared to a continuous planting.

Use low maintenance materials - Choose plants and construction materials that require the least maintenance. Plants that require constant watering, pruning, and spraying are time consuming and expensive. Try to use improved varieties that resist



insects and diseases. Also, maintenance is least when you use a continuous bed planting. A continuous bed is also easier to prepare than individual pit plantings.

Use evergreen plants in the foundation planting. You can use broadleaf evergreens as well as narrowleaf evergreens. Extension Publication 666, *Selecting Landscape Plants*, makes your plant selection easy. Ask your Extension agent for a free copy.

When selecting plants, be sure the plants meet these standards: Plants should be the proper size to be in scale with your home. Plants should be well adapted to your soil and climate zone. Plants should be easy to maintain. Plants should be compatible with other plants in the foundation planting so as to create unity in the overall design.

One common mistake in placing the foundation plants is getting them too close to the walls of the house. It is important that they have plenty of room to develop into well shaped plants. Be sure to allow at least a 3-foot space between the wall and the planting.

If your roof does not have gutters, determine where the roof water will be dripping. Avoid planting plants directly under the roof's drip line by moving them slightly forward or backward.

Planting areas may be bordered with low dwarf shrubs or ground covers. This will help define the foundation planting area and help reduce weeding by preventing lawn grass from growing into the shrub bed.

Another common mistake is placing the small, new shrubs too close together. Follow the suggested plant spacing recommendation given in *"Selecting Landscape Plants"*. With a few years' growth, the plants will fill out and form a nice foundation planting.