



Sedum 'Frosty Morn'

Petite Gardenscapes

Sensible designs for the weekend gardener

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Rock on!

Some of us spend weeks and months picking rocks out of our landscape. Other wiser folks use their heads and the rocks to punctuate plantings, add structure, and provide an interesting backdrop to the plantings in the landscape.



home-landscape-plan.com

There are some general rules to follow if you want cool rocks in your beds and borders. Horticulture magazine contributor Jeff Cox offered the following pieces of advice:

1) Use **odd numbers** of stones in a grouping. Using odd numbers is an Asian design principle allowing for a graceful placement rather than rigid "rows".

2) Use a large **dominant rock** with several smaller ones. Think Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and Baby Bear proportions.

3) Before digging or buying rocks, think about **proportion**: you want your rocks to look in the right proportion and natural in your landscape

4) Speaking of **large**, don't bother messing with small rocks which will get lost in the undergrowth. If you want rocks to make a point, they have to be visible.

5) Since a natural formation of rocks would come out of the same layer of bedrock, use stones of the **same kind and color**.

6) Achieve **balance** in your "rock group". Look at the group from the place where you'll most often see it. (This isn't like moving plants all over the garden, using the "plants have wheels" concept.) You want to think this over, measure three times, and move once.

7. **Bury the rocks**- they aren't found sitting out of the ground in nature- one third of their height needs to be partly underground.

8. The **heaviest end** of the rock needs to be in contact with the earth- you rarely find a rock with a pointy end down and big end up in the air. Enough said.

9. Put your rocks' **best faces forward**- at least in the direction they'll be seen most often. Sedimentary layers or a good patina deserve an audience.



the-landscape-design-site.com

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A Rolling Stone gathers no moss.....



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Talking about rocks leads to that old saying which naturally leads to moss. Moss is not for everyone. In fact, it grows best in the Pacific Northwest and the forests of Maine, so cool and wet are the best bet. Wisconsin can get pretty warm in the summer, but humidity also usually comes along with the heat. So, if you have a really shady area, and are up for something different, consider trying moss.

Other conditions conducive to moss culture are compacted soil, low fertility in the soil, acidic soil (lots of pine trees) shallow soil depth and shade



The first thing to know about moss is it doesn't have the same plumbing that plants and trees have. Since it doesn't have roots or a vascular system (think veins moving blood and oxygen around in you), its only chance to live is to be close to the moisture it needs to survive and thrive. Our goal here is to have thriving moss. Pathetic little bundles languishing in the shade would not make anyone happy, least of all your moss.



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Another thing about moss is it comes in two "styles" : Carpet (above) or pad-producers (below) The carpet kind creeps along and weave their stems in and out to form a mass. The pad-producer type grows vertically in mounds or tufts. One of the common mosses found in Wisconsin is Hair Cap Moss (*Polytrichum* spp) and can achieve heights of 12 inches.



Treesforlive.org.uk

If you're starting to think about trying a moss garden, you'll be pleased to know there are 400 native species in Wisconsin.

A very good article has been produced by Mark Dwyer of Rotary Gardens in Janesville here in Wisconsin. He gives all the steps needed to establish a moss garden, so I won't attempt to tell you how. I'll let Mark do it. Follow the link below to find a great Moss tutorial.

It may be too late this season to start a moss garden, but Fall is a good time, so if you've got the right spot, the right time will be coming up in a few short months!

http://www.GardenSMART.com/?p=articles&title=Moss_Gardening



Alternatives to the Honey Bee

In the past years, we've been reading about CCD or Colony Collapse Disorder, the odd syndrome that has been killing the honey bee, one of the more important pollinators of plants and orchard trees. The current thinking is that a combination of stressors, viruses, and insecticides have combined to cause the demise of the honey bee. What can we replace the honey bee with?

Mason Bees (*Osmia* species) are a good alternative



Frogpondphotography

to the honey bee: they are non-aggressive and good garden pollinators. They need a nest (see picture below) easily made or ordered on-line as a good Christmas gift (thank you, honey).

In the last week, several bees have shown interest, and I have placed an old bowl of soil nearby and keep it watered to form the mud they need to plug the tube after filling it with their eggs, pollen, and nectar. They are efficient too: about 500 Mason Bees can do the same job as 100,000 honeybees.



Another pollinator is the Leafcutter Bee (*Megachile*



Greatsunflower.org

species) which is small gentle, solitary (not forming colonies or nests) and gray. They are also more efficient than the honeybee, with 150 of them doing as much

work as 3,000 honeybees. If you want them in your garden, you can make a home for them by drilling a wood block with $\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide holes, or even bundles of drinking straws glued into a metal can. If you don't get around to making a home for them, they will nest in hollow plant stems or holes made by other insects.

We can't forget our friend Mr. Bumblebee (*Bombus* species) .



wsc.ma.edu

They are a more social group of insects, but their underground groups rarely hold more than 500 bees. They sting only if directly threatened. To me, they look like the sign of true summer, bumbling merrily from flower to flower. Many commercial greenhouses keep bumblebee colonies around and manage to co-exist quite happily. They pollinate tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, melons, raspberries, blackberries, and cranberries. They are the **ONLY** pollinators of potatoes, and will be attracted to your garden by red clover.

Finally, the Hoverfly (*Syrphidae* sp) which is not a true bee, but is worth its weight in gold as it is a natural enemy of aphids and leafhoppers, as well as a pollinator of herbs, yarrow and coreopsis.



picceies.flybywire.org.uk

The honeybee may be in serious trouble as evidenced by CCD, but all is not lost in the gardening world if we attract alternative pollinators which are just willing and ready to step into the place of their partner bees in the garden. Give them a try: offer them a happy place to be and a new home and they may surprise you with their gentle and hard-working natures.



Time in the Garden by Elizabeth O'Connell, Ozaukee Gardener

This is the time of year when recent additions to your garden may be making their true character known. The key to deciding whether to keep some of these aggressive plants is discovering how they grow and spread. This should help you decide whether to keep them in your garden.

Plants spread in several ways. Almost all of them set seed although in some hybrid plants these may be sterile. Self-sowing can be eliminated if the gardener is willing to get out and remove the flowers (deadheads) from the plant in question as soon as they begin to fade. This not only keeps things looking neat and tidy but prevents seeds from forming.

Without the need to produce seeds your plants put their energy into growing larger and stronger for next year or producing a new set of flowers this summer. If new flowers develop be sure to remove them promptly. Some perennials will even produce a third flush of flowers if promptly deadheaded.

If you miss a few flowers you may find seedlings popping up. If they're unwanted it's easiest to remove them as soon as they appear. After a rain storm or after you've watered is the best time to weed since the roots pull out of moist soil with less effort.

The most aggressive plants are more difficult to control because they spread through creeping stems called rhizomes and stolons. Both present challenges to gardeners. Many of these plants can be rewarding to grow, however, if you're willing to do the work involved in controlling their spread.

Stolons are stems that creep along the surface of the soil. At nodes along each stolon new leaves and roots sprout to produce a new plant identical to the parent. Plants like strawberries spread this way. Cutting these surface runners as they appear is the easiest way to prevent the plant from spreading. Installing barriers can also control their growth. Stoloniferous woody plants like dogwoods can also be controlled by pruning to prevent the branches from making contact with the soil and rooting.

Rhizomes, also modified stems, grow out of sight underground. Plants with this habit - ferns and Japanese anemones for example - may take more work to control. The rhizomes will crawl under barriers and

unwanted plants can pop up yards away from the initial planting. They may even sprout within clumps of highly desirable plants where they're maddening to remove.

Even less aggressive rhizome formers like irises present maintenance issues. Irises should be lifted and divided regularly (every two or three years) to ensure healthy plants and vigorous blossoming. If this job is neglected the gardener is eventually confronted by a solid mass of thick, intertwined, tuberous rhizomes that are difficult to pry out of the soil. Restoring a neglected iris patch to good order will require backbreaking work - the force required to lift the mass can break the handle on a garden fork. Pests like iris borer thrive in the overcrowded mess, too, feasting on the fleshy rhizomes before maturing and moving on to infest other related plants like blackberry lilies.

A lot of these unwelcome maintenance issues can be avoided if you get to know the growth habit of a plant before it's in your garden. Then you can decide if the work required to successfully grow the plant is something that's realistic for you. Many people are willing to spend one afternoon every other year to divide iris but know they aren't going to spend an hour a week clipping old flowers off dozens of plants. Others find deadheading for a few minutes after work a pleasant way to unwind. It's important to assess what jobs you're willing to do or your garden can quickly become a burden rather than something to enjoy.

Unfortunately, most of us are seduced by plants, purchase them and then learn how to grow them. Even reliable plants that perform well for friends can become a problem once you bring them home so be prepared for some surprises. Problem plants may not display boorish behavior their first year or even the second, but many "run" in their third season when they've established a vigorous root system and have stored enough energy to start reproducing.

Be ruthless about removing plants that become so aggressive they threaten to gobble up your time and energy. Installing the right plants and being realistic about your commitment to maintain them are the first steps in creating a landscape that provide year around pleasure without overwhelming your life.



DIY Fungus Fighters- thanks to Garden Gate Magazine

From the questions I get, the fungus among us, in Wisconsin at least, attacks our favorite garden plants with impunity. Blackspot, Powdery Mildew and Damping Off diseases can really get us down. You can buy preparations at your local nursery, but here are some homemade remedies to counteract those nasty fungi. Garden Gate magazine contributor Marcia Leeper vouches for these recipes. They work and better yet, they are non-toxic. And best of all, they are made from inexpensive ingredients you'll find in your kitchen.



Blackspot remedy: Mix 1 qt water, 1 t. baking soda and ½ t. liquid soap (Ivory is mild and not a detergent) Shake them together in a spray bottle and apply to tops and undersides of rose leaves. Important: do this on a cloudy day or early in the morning, as the mix can burn leaves on a hot, sunny day. Marcia says it's best to spray before the rose is infested, although if there are a few blotches, the treatment will keep blackspot from getting worse.



Damping off disease: Soak one chamomile tea bag in a quart of water for 15-20 min. Mist the solution over seedlings and young plants or use it to water flats from the bottom.



Powdery Mildew: Mix 3 c. water w/ 1/3 c. milk, whole or skim. Shake the mixture well and spray it on the plant until the leaves drip. Again, best to spray before the infestation. Phlox, cucumbers and bee balm (monarda). It won't harm plants with fuzzy leaves and it won't smell, either.



Good Fungus Creator: Sprinkle ½ c. of corn meal around every plant, then cover with a layer of bark mulch. It is said to promote the growth of a good fungus that competes with the ones that cause blackspot and other fungal diseases.

And for the orchid lovers, rub cinnamon gently on **fungal leaf spots**- and don't overdo it. Too much cinnamon can burn the plant.



Finally, ground cinnamon sprinkled over the top of potting mix will stop **damping off** of all kinds of seedlings.



Dry Shade Gardening

As a gardener with, in my least favorite terms, the “dry shade garden from Hell” both in the front and side of my yard, I’ve spent lots of time trying to turn the beds into lush oases of color. Yeah, right, that’s not happened, even after the hundreds of hours spent in horticulture classes. But I’ve learned a few strategies that have helped get me started on the way to those lush beds.

Amend the soil- here in southeastern Wisconsin, the soil is clay, which is hard enough. In the shade it gets like modeling clay or worse turns to something like lava. So, adding organic amendments make the soil both workable and holding the moisture the poor plants are dying for (literally, dying) Fine Gardening magazine recommends the use of **expanded shale** (see link for more information on one product). I can’t vouch for it, but may try it in one area to see if it works.

<http://www.organicminedminerals.com/Expanded%20Shale%20-%20TruGro.htm>

Use liquid fertilizers instead of granules to make sure your plants, not the trees above them, get the benefits. Your trees (the reason for all the shade) are masters at taking the water and nutrients in the soil from your plants –the bullies!

No rototilling under the trees- you will harm the roots of your trees- and they’re expensive to replace when they’re gone. Instead plant perennials near and between the roots.

Water deeply. Soaker hoses will benefit your plants better than an hour’s watering, especially if the soil is compacted. If you can’t do soaker hoses, water in bursts several times to give the ground time to absorb the water.

A shrub for the dry shade is one I’d never heard of before taking a class from plant expert Ed Lyon. He recommends **Fiveleaf Aralia** aka *Eleutherococcus sieboldianus* ‘Variegatus’ shown here in the shade. Variegatus is smaller than the species (5 feet or less compared the 8-10 feet) and has a pretty green and creamy white palmate leaf.



Finally, the plant that can take dry shade and love it: the lowly Sedum- both uprights, and the prostrate groundcovers will forgive you and bloom. Bless them!



Sedum ‘Blackjack’



Sedum tetractinum



Gardening with Allergies by Elizabeth O'Connell, Ozaukee Gardener

Just because you share your household with an allergy sufferer doesn't mean you can't have a garden. Careful selection of plants near your home can lower pollen count and ease the misery caused by pollen.

Pollen allergies are on the increase and it's not surprising since the desire for low maintenance gardening has filled cities and suburbs with pollen producing male plants. Males don't produce seeds and fruit to clean off the lawn but they do pump pollen into the air to plague those with allergies.

Author Tom Ogren, a former horticulture instructor, became interested in the allergy issues posed by landscape plants because his wife has severe allergy issues. He's written several books about landscaping for those with allergy issues and they're a good starting point to learn more about how to limit pollen, mold and skin problems from home gardens*.

Allergy sufferers should avoid bark mulch and compost piles which may have mold spores in them. Pollen counts are frequently lower mid-day so that may be a better time to plan outdoor activities. And gardeners and allergy sufferers alike may benefit from showering after time outdoors to remove pollen and other allergens from hair and skin.

Here are some suggestions for low pollen plantings:

Annuals - petunias, pansies, geraniums, dahlias, snapdragons

Flowering shrubs - dark-leaved ornamental cherry and plum, ornamental almond, ornamental pears, rhododendrons and azaleas, hydrangeas

Evergreens - female hollies, firs, cedar

Deciduous trees - magnolia, dogwood, tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)

*these books by Tom Ogren are available from Ten Speed Press:

Allergy-Free Gardening

Avoiding Allergies by Use of the Right Native Plant in Your Garden

Safe Sex in the Garden





A Quick Tip for the Frugal Gardener:

by Elizabeth O'Connell, *Ozaukee Gardener*

Some early summer flowers like columbine and lupine are already setting seeds. Instead of buying more plants next spring try “planting” your own right now.

Simply allow one flower stem on a favorite plant to go to seed. Be sure to let the stem stand until the seed cases turn brown and are completely dry. Check frequently so you can harvest the seed cases before they burst open. Then snip the stem and either lay it on the soil where you'd like new plants or shake the ripe seed cases where you'd like new plants.

By the end of summer you should see seedlings popping up. You can either thin

them this year or wait for next spring. The baby plants won't bloom for two years but they're more likely to survive and flower for you than nursery plants and they don't cost a thing.

Because the bees carry pollen from one plant to another, seedlings won't necessarily resemble their parents. A spurless 'Nora Barlow' columbine's genes may produce “granny's hat” offspring, for example, that would be expensive to purchase. New color may also appear in open-pollinated seeds. It's a win for both your garden and your pocketbook.

Making Life Easier in the Garden: Some Last Tips for Summer

One More Fungus Fighting Recipe

Barbara Burkholder is Garden Gate Magazine's winner with this home-grown recipe:

3T baking soda
2 T. Murphy's Oil Soap
2T. canola oil
2T white vinegar
2 gallons warm water.

Mix and spray the plants until the mixture runs off the leaves. She reports that her plants stay disease- and insect-free, and the flowers perk up. Remember to spray on cloudy days, or early in the morning to prevent burning the leaves.

Save your back and your lawn when hauling those large rocks you're incorporating into your landscape, rolls of sod, or heavy bags of topsoil by using one of those little snow sleds kid use: they're thin, flexible plastic, as well as strong and won't tear up your lawn when you pull your load around.