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My mother-in-law has a great knack for home repairs; she is what Israelis call a "kolboinik." She has fixed her sewing machine, vacuum cleaner, transistor, typewriter and dozens of other items. But until I entered the scene, her gardening was strictly a hit-and-miss affair.

People seem to mistakenly believe that it's a cinch to plan, develop and maintain their gardens and terraces. But successful landscape gardening takes years of practical experience, education and training.

When planning your outdoor garden, try following these five steps:

1. A carefully thought-out program
2. A thorough analysis of the site
3. A realistic assessment of available resources (including budget)

Landscape designer Reuven Applebaum talks about planning an outdoor garden.

4. A conceptual plan
5. The final drawing of your plan

This process will help you create a garden that works as a whole.

1. The program

This includes all the needs that you hope the garden will satisfy. Think about why you want a garden:

- Is it a display of colorful flowers which is important to you?
- Are you looking for a quiet place to get away from the world?
- Perhaps your greatest concern is having a place to throw large outdoor parties?

Make a list of all the practical needs you would like the garden to provide. This will give you direction as you work on your design.

2. The site analysis

This is the information-gathering stage. In order to create an effective garden, you need to know about the piece of land you are working with.

- How big is it?
- Is the land level or steeply sloped?
- How much sunlight does it receive?
- What are its surroundings like? Is your land located in a noisy urban setting or in an agricultural setting?
- Are there impressive views to be seen there?

The answers you come up with will help you determine whether your original program is appropriate. For example, suppose you had your heart set on a vegetable garden. If you find that the site is too shady, it is time to replan your program. The same shade that foils your original idea can be an asset for another idea, such as a cool

sitting spot to escape the summer heat. A skilled designer knows how to exploit the hidden potential of a site and will not hold on too rigidly to preconceptions of what the garden will ultimately be like.

3. Assessing your resources

Think about the materials you have at your disposal as well

as your financial limitations. Creative thinking comes in very handy here. One well-known landscape designer found chunks of torn-up asphalt on his site, and he used them to form a beautiful curb lining his driveway. Inexpensive fieldstone can be used with very graceful effects.

4. The conceptual plan

Until now you have been gathering information. You now have a list of your needs, a list of facts about the site and a list of resources which are realistic to obtain. The conceptual plan is like a great melting pot into which all this information is thrown. Draw a simple map showing the walls of the house, the borders of the property, and any major landmarks. Take the elements from your list of needs (for example: an area for my kids to play, a place to be alone, etc.) and try putting them in this location or that one. Each time think whether the conditions in that location (sunlight, wind, soil type, slope, etc.) suit the desired activity. Keep trying out different combinations and possibilities. Even more important, think about how the entire garden can be tied together. For example you might use one or two materials repeatedly to create a motif found throughout the garden.

5. The final plan

At this point you must get specific about plants and materials you are going to use. If you have a good eye for composition you will be able to choose those that form harmonious and exciting combinations of color and texture.

Furthermore, the plants and materials chosen should be well suited to their environment. Plants need to be able to withstand the coldest and/or hottest temperatures in your area. Also they have to suit the particular type of soil on your land. Similarly one has to choose materials which will be able to endure in your garden's particular situation.

A wooden slat fence would not be appropriate in a place where very strong winds prevail for it is likely to be blown down. In this regard it is best to consult someone with plenty of outdoor construction experience in order to make choices that will work in the long run.



A garden for all seasons