



Gardening Insights

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Garden Art

In the next few issues, I'll discuss garden art - why it's an important component of a landscape, how to choose, site and light pieces, plus some of my favorite sources for unique works.

Art in the garden will impress or otherwise engage visitors, provide focal points, complement or contrast with natural elements, and create interest in times when plants are dormant. But the most important reasons for incorporating art, in my opinion, are personal and ecological.

Art is how we reveal our personalities and make spaces our own - and it is as important outside as inside. The most interesting and effective gardens are those where owners have incorporated sculpture, wall art, or functional pieces that reflect their inner selves. Plants can't do that. So I encourage you to spend as much time working on outdoor art as indoor art and, if possible, creating your own work for display. Perhaps not everyone will appreciate your choices, but you will enjoy your garden more and that's what matters. Garden art is also a component of ecologically sound designs. Artworks require no water, no fertilizer, and little maintenance, so they reduce the need for those inputs in a garden that might otherwise rely on masses of flowers for visual excitement.

Functional art does double duty. It is visually interesting and useful for humans and/or wildlife. Small fountains are visited by birds for drinking and bathing, wood sculptures drilled with small tunnels create habitat for native bees, and other pieces can be designed to incorporate nesting spaces or housing for birds and lizards. The photo above are examples of functional garden art. On the left is a ceramic hose guide made by artist Erik Gronborg for his garden in Encinitas, California. He also made the sculptural blue chair on the right. Ceramic artist Joyce Schleiniger, also of Encinitas, created the wall plaque planter in the center. It provided just the right touch for an otherwise bland concrete block wall in her backyard. Their gardens are delightful examples of personalities on exhibit outdoors.



Check out these Blogs

I'm fascinated by the evolution of the city of Detroit. I drive vicariously through neighborhoods using Google Map "street view" and imagine living there. Once a thriving center for automobile production, it's population has halved since the 60s and crowded neighborhoods around the downtown are being abandoned. Tens of thousands of homes and businesses have been razed or fallen into heaps and entire blocks are returning to grassland and woods. It's awful when one considers the effects on individuals that live or lived there, but it's gripping from an ecological and city planning perspective. What will happen to the city as its urban center is separated from the still wealthy suburbs by a swath of green? Will the center wither and die? Will the green belt become an asset as a giant park? Or will it develop into clusters of small farms that provide food for the inner and outer rings where people still live? What's it like for the people who remain? Is it quieter, safer, and more like a small rural town? Is it better for kids who have more room to play and interesting places to explore? I also wonder if this is happening to other industrial centers in the US.

Google "abandoned Detroit" and you'll find several interesting links that show formerly gracious buildings in disrepair and if you look at satellite views of the city, you'll see how green it is around the commercial center. One blog with great photos is: <http://vividlyvintage.com/2010/08/18/detroits-abandoned-mansions/>



If this piques your interest, you might also enjoy Bldgblog.blogspot.com. The writer posts unusual and intriguing links related to the built human environment. A great example is his article on Maunsell towers: <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com/2009/09/maunsell-towers.html>. Wow!

Another of my favorite blogs, completely unrelated to the above, is Sharon Cahoon's "Fresh Dirt" for Sunset Magazine -- <http://freshdirt.sunset.com/>. She covers all sorts of topics related to gardening and finds lots of fun links to explore.

Got any blogs you'd like to share? I'd love to hear what you're finding out there!



GARDENING INSIGHTS - LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND SCULPTURE - "WHERE ART MEETS ECOLOGY"

Our LEAF* design philosophy and practices include:

- * Local plants, materials, art, and architecture
- * Eco-friendly ways to save water, avoid chemicals, and encourage wildlife
- * Artistic, inspiring, and creative uses of plants, sculpture, and other outdoor elements
- * Functional design for spaces that are easy to live in and easy to maintain

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