

Art in the Garden

Urban Horticulture

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Plants are obviously the focal points in any garden, but a garden can benefit from well-chosen pieces of art. They add interest to the landscape, especially if the pieces are placed to afford the viewer with an unexpected sensory treat. Utilitarian elements, such as furniture, can be functional as well as beautiful.

There are some “unwritten rules” about artwork in the garden, the biggest being less is more. You want to select pieces that will reflect the mood or theme to your landscape, not have it look like you’re holding a yard sale. Take your cues from your landscape style: a pagoda for an Asian-themed garden; whimsical pieces for a fairy garden or just for fun; natural bird houses for a woodland look.

In addition to your style, you also want to pay attention to proportion. A large looming fountain would overpower a small garden while a small statue might become lost among towering plants.

Materials can be natural or man-made, purchased or created by the gardener. If you want to create your own pieces, look at objects in a different way. Think of objects you might discard, such as the metal frame of a dining table. Bracing the piece at the bottom to stand upright and oxidize to a warm patina, the piece could become an interesting addition to your landscape for little or no money!

Lighting can create dramatic scenes to your nighttime landscape and be used to highlight special pieces. You can choose to place spot lights to illuminate various features, string lights to emphasize an interesting form, or use small stick lights to guide you along your stepping stone path. You’ll be able to enjoy your artwork day and night. You can select from hardwired, plug in, or solar!



FIGURE 1. CREDITS: CREATIVE COMMONS



FIGURE 2. CREDITS: CREATIVE COMMONS

Here are some ideas for adding artwork to your landscape:

Fountains – not only add visual appeal but also add the sensory charm of flowing water plus a benefit to wildlife.

Bird Houses – can be both functional and beautiful, choose ones with inside access for clean-up time when the birds have left.

Sculptures – one large piece can become the focal point in an area, smaller pieces such as fairy houses can create a miniature garden within a garden.

Stepping Stones – draw your eye down a path or towards another garden area; creating your own can be a good project to do with children.

While not specific pieces of art, the following elements can bring a special artistic feel to your landscape:

Gates and Fencing – these can add architectural elements as well as being a security feature.

Trellises and Arbors – providing structure for climbing plants, they also become a decorative element. For lightweight vines, try hanging a trellis sideways along a fence for a totally different look to the usual vertical placement.

Benches and seats – you could create a couple of sitting stools out of old tree trunk pieces; ornate metal benches can be found on the internet and at local stores. You could use lumber and landscaping stones or cinderblocks to create a different, more modern style of bench.

Tables – as simple or elaborate as you choose. You can use ceramic tile pieces to cover the top of a table, or turn a plain wooden picnic table into a family project using paint!

Let your own style come forth in your landscape, and see how well-chosen pieces can bring additional beauty to Mother Nature's own design skills.

Factsheet Layout by Kaitlin Hammersley, Master Gardener, UF/IFAS Extension, Pinellas County

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