

Spectacular Side Yards

Urban Horticulture

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Debi Ford, Master Gardener, UF/IFAS Extension, Pinellas County

Theresa Badurek, UF/IFAS Extension, Pinellas County

Gardeners tend to focus their efforts on the major areas of their landscape, mainly the front and back yard spaces. All too often, side yards become forgotten, turning into little more than storage areas.

Changing a neglected side yard into a special space just requires some planning, and a little effort (or a lot, if you're ambitious!), to change the forgotten space into something special, someplace you'll look forward to visiting.

You will probably have some challenges to overcome, but that's part of the fun in thinking about how you'll use the space.



FIGURE 1. CREDITS: CREATIVE COMMONS

Challenge: Light conditions

Side yards tend to be shady spots due to building placement or hedges and trees. Or you may have full sun most of the day.

Solution #1: This is a great opportunity to use shade-loving plants! Bright colors will stand out more in the shade as well. OR...

Solution #2: If your side yard is in full sun, how about a raised-bed vegetable garden! You could even add some herbs and fruit-bearing plants!

Challenge: Side yards are narrow

Solution: Because the areas are smaller, you can splurge on a few special plants, decorative items, or other elements as you won't need to cover a large space.

Challenge: A side yard is an afterthought

Solution: Use a step stone path to draw the eye down the space towards a special place, perhaps a quiet hideaway or a raised-bed vegetable and herb garden.

Challenge: Hiding the view of neighboring yards

Solution: Screen the view of the neighboring property with tall plants, using shade-loving plants as appropriate below along with ground cover and mulch.

What Do You Want To Do In The Space?

Next, you'll decide how you want to use the space:

- An entryway with a step stone path towards a gate with ground cover and a few select plants in containers?
- A small patio with a table and chairs, surrounded by ground cover, in ground plants?
- A working side yard that has a shed, perhaps a rain barrel or potting bench, with a mulch path, ground cover and plants to soften the look?



FIGURE 2. CREDITS: CREATIVE COMMONS

Plant selection to accomplish your goals

In addition to selecting plants based on light conditions, you'll also want to group plants together according to their moisture needs. For variety, select landscape plants that vary in height, texture, and color for a more natural look. Repetition is the key to creating a landscape that feels cohesive.

The Plan

- ✓ Follow Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ practices.
- ✓ Have utility lines marked before you dig.
- ✓ Draw out your plan so you can mark existing utility and irrigation lines, existing plants you want to keep, any design elements such as paths, patios, where you'll place all your new plants and other items you'll use.
- ✓ Consider installing a drip irrigation system from a nearby spigot, or convert your in-ground irrigation for that zone, but don't mix drip irrigation with rotors or sprinkler heads in the same zone.
- ✓ Have a soil test done so you know what the pH is and can amend the soil as needed.
- ✓ Make a list of the items you'll need: plants, stepping stones, soil mixes and any amendments, containers, mulch, decorative items, everything you'll need.
- ✓ Check your plants frequently during the first few weeks to make sure they're doing well. Final task: Visit your side yard often to enjoy your new creation!

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