

Garden Design Interview for Lamplighter Issue- July 2017

“Find the Soul of a Place” by Kim Halyak

This is the 6th of several interviews with Memphis landscape designers. We hope these articles inspire you to create beautiful and functional gardens that best meet your family needs. This month’s designer is Margaret Leggett, a semi-retired landscaper designer. Additionally, Margaret is employed at Palladio, our Cooper-Young Garden Center.

1. What is your occupation and how long have you worked in it?
 - I’m a garden/landscape designer, semi-retired after working professionally for 26 years. Currently, I am employed with Palladio Garden in sales, showroom/grounds design, as well as garden design, in conjunction with sales of our fountains, urns, planters, and statuary. I also incorporate appropriate selection from our extensive inventory of architectural pieces into many gardens and landscapes, i.e. vintage doors, windows, and ironwork.
2. Tell me a little about your life/work experiences/interests.
 - I was an art major in a previous life before discovering my real creative medium, garden design. When my children were little we spent much time in our large backyard digging, planting, building and playing. I fell in love with gardening and structuring a functional and beautiful space for my family and friends. I went on to design and build many in and around the city.
3. How would you address the challenge of designing for our small, urban Cooper-Young gardens?
 - A great way for homeowners to avoid a cluttered look is to limit the number of plant selections chosen. Larger structures give more importance or “weight” to small spaces. Overgrown shrubs can sometimes be pruned into trees. Adding windows, doors or mirrors to fences can enlarge a space and suggest additional “rooms”.

4. What do you consider to be the most frequent mistake made by urban gardeners?
 - Planting foundation plants too close to the house. Also, forgetting to take plant size maturity into account when planting. This causes the good features of the house to be hidden. Attention is drawn to unsightly views in an effort to hide them.
5. Are there plants you think are overused or underused in our area.
 - Overused plants include: Trees, such as Bradford Pear, Leyland Cypress, Willow Oak—they break easily and create debris. I'd avoid Crepe Myrtles unless you let them stay in natural form.
 - Azaleas are lovely, but are often overdone. Avoid Encore azaleas which don't do well here. Also, monkey grass lining walks and beds.
 - Great shade plants I recommend include: Oakleaf, Annabelle, and other white blooming hydrangeas, Mahonia holly, Nandina, and Leucothoe.
6. What are the advantages of hiring a professional designer?
 - Designers are experienced at site evaluation, scale, proportion, and 3-dimensional viewing. They know the best plant varieties for each space. A well-designed garden blends all elements into a cohesive feel.
7. Describe how you partner with the homeowner to create and execute a design.
 - I start by interviewing the homeowners about their space and style preferences. I study the views outside the windows, noting site elevation and neighboring properties. I like to tour the neighborhood and nurseries with the homeowners.
8. What is the starting point for creating a functional and beautiful design?

- Look for pictures you like in magazines and hire a designer or consultant who will listen to your wants and needs and incorporate them into your design. A good designer will ask applicable questions. Be open-minded about suggestions and changes you may not have considered. Always consider a budget.
9. Urban gardeners are often busy people. What is your best advice for high-impact/low-maintenance gardening?
- Use uncomplicated, sweeping lines. I like to use trees and ground cover alone with gives strong contrasts in size, color, and texture. Use plants that need little care and pruning. Another way to save time is to create beds when possible, especially in shaded areas. This reduces lawn mowing + time spent weeding. Use mulches regularly and add irrigation when possible.
10. Do you have a specific, inexpensive tip that would help our neighbors create a “Wow factor” or dial their gardens up a notch?
- Use mass plantings of a single color. Add the unexpected. Throw in an element, texture, or color that may seem slightly “off”, but will catch the eye and create excitement.
11. What else would you like for Cooper-Young to know about you, your business, and gardening in general?
- I love a challenge—sometimes the biggest obstacles turn out to be the biggest assets. Every project is unique and I try to bring out the nuances that make them special. **“Find the Soul” of a place** (architecture, garden, homeowners’ tastes) and put them together in a cohesive way. I like to create landscapes that look like a “designer” has never been there. On the other hand, it’s also fun to do something funky and unexpected.
11. What is the best way for interested homeowners to reach you.
- call 277-9451 or email me at margaretdleggett@gmail.com