

ANNUAL COOPER-YOUNG GARDEN WALK

NEWSLETTER INTERVIEW with Lisa Orgler

1. What is your occupation and how long have you worked in it?

I am currently a lecturer in the Department of Horticulture at Iowa State University (ISU). I've been in that position for over six years. I teach landscape graphics, the introductory design lecture and studio, plus landscape construction. My degrees are in landscape architecture.

2. Tell me a little about your life/work experiences/interests?

I was formerly the assistant director at Reiman Gardens, ISU's botanic garden for 8 years, plus practiced landscape architecture for 10 years at ISU's Facilities Planning and Management. While at both of these positions I was able to teach University courses, plus gave many public presentations and workshops. I fell in love with teaching and was so delighted to get the position I'm currently in.

My teaching has extended into my current blog, www.PaperGardenWorkshop.com. It has gone through some changes over the years but finally has a focus that fits my talents. The objective of my blog is to teach garden design and landscape graphics in a spirited way. I strive to keep my teaching methods simple and approachable for those of varied design levels.

3. How would you address the challenge of designing for our small, urban Cooper-Young gardens?

I think small spaces are the most fun to design! In the US, so many of us have large yards and are overwhelmed with them. With a small yard you can focus on creating one or two (really strong) outdoor rooms, then focus on the details of furniture, containers and hardscape materials.

4. What do you consider to be the most frequent mistake made by urban gardeners?

My answer is not focused just towards urban gardeners, but gardeners in general. We tend to place plants in the ground before we create the spatial design or room first. Landscape design is about creating outdoor spaces, so think about how you can create your lawn or patio first (with a dominant shape like a circle or square), then use your lovely plants to surround those spaces.

5. Are there plants you think are overused or underused in typical gardens?

I understand that we all have our plant preferences and might overuse some. For instance, my husband is an avid hosta collector. Who am I to tell him he can't have hostas? I just encourage him to fold in other shade plants with them. All plants have their place and if a plant brings someone joy, let it be. In regards to underused plants...there are many! Where do I begin? My best advice is to visit plant sales (especially at botanic gardens and nurseries that specialize in unique plants) and purchase plants that have the requirements you need, but are new to you. One of my favorite plants, geums, I discovered that way.

6. What are the advantages of hiring a professional designer?

A professional designer should inspire you to think beyond anything you can imagine for your outdoor space! They can help you create strong outdoor rooms, plus can even introduce you to some new plants to expand your palette (if you're an avid species collector like I mentioned above!)

7. Describe how you partner with the homeowner to create and execute a design.

I learn about them and the site, go through the design process, plus invite them to give feedback at certain points (structure, preliminary). It's incredibly important to me that the new design is *their* garden, not something just pulled from a book.

8. What is the starting point for creating a functional and beautiful design?

Honestly, as basic as it sounds, I give full trust in the design process. It works. Collecting information from the client and site, developing a concept, creating conceptual drawings, defining garden rooms, and getting feedback along the way. I'll talk about this process from two different angles when I present at the garden tour in May.

9. Urban gardeners are often busy people. What is your best advice for high-impact/low-maintenance gardening?

Invest in a good landscape design that emphasizes strong garden rooms with amazing hardscapes (patios, walls, pergolas and fences). Fill in your beds with plants. That may seem obvious, but many of us leave large gaps between plants just waiting for weeds to jump in. Once our beds are filled with plants we love, you won't even have to mulch anymore!

10. Do you have a specific, inexpensive tip that would help our neighbors create a "Wow factor" or dial their gardens up a notch?

Place containers in the right places (at your main entrance or on a patio). Stuff them with a variety of forms and textures. Those in the industry refer to the forms as thrillers (upright showy plants), fillers (rounded plants) and spillers (those that droop over the sides). Full containers are more powerful than a single, underscale plant in the middle of the pot. For a more traditional look, I also love small evergreens in containers. Round or pointy evergreens give a more formal look. Experiment with different plants and make a bold statement that fits you.

11. What else would you like for Cooper-Young to know about you, your blog, and gardening in general?

I am over-the-top enthusiastic about garden design (you'll hopefully see this when you meet me in person!) and enjoy teaching others about it. There is something magical and mysterious about landscape design and I love unraveling it for others so they feel empowered to design their own outdoor spaces.

12. What is the best way for interested homeowners to reach you?

You may visit my blog at www.papergardenworkshop.com or email me at lisa@papergardenworkshop.com

