

Landscape design can meet many backyard desires

Homeowner wants to add privacy and beautify her yard

Q: I live in a small cottage home in a nice location, but my “blah” backyard has too much lawn and not enough privacy from my neighbors.

I like my neighbors, but don’t feel like saying “hello” every morning when I am in the yard with my coffee. Could you suggest some creative ways to remodel my backyard?

– Rachel Williams
Sacramento

A. Many homeowners yearn for a private park in their own backyard for relaxing as well as a practical yard to meet their family’s needs for entertaining and play, says Susan Silva, owner of Susan Silva Landscape Design in Orangevale.

There’s a multitude of things to consider before putting a shovel into the ground, so it is always best to start with a plan designed to cover the overall picture, even if you have to implement it in stages.

“Privacy can be easily addressed with trees and tall shrubs, but it’s vital to consider the size of the yard,” Silva says. “In smaller yards, I like to mix varieties of tall, linear shrubs along the fence line and add canopy-type trees so you can see underneath them to other areas of

the yard and enjoy the shade they create for the patio area.

“In larger backyards, the choices of big trees and shrubs are endless, but they need to be properly planted in the right locations, always considering their growth at maturity.”

Sometimes the best remedy for a two-story house overlooking the rear property line is a tall trellis or patio cover designed with lattice panels to create immediate privacy. Silva often suggests placing a gazebo in just the right spot, and enclosing it with billowy, outdoor fabric drapes to allow for private dining.

Arbors, gazebos, and patio covers all need to be properly placed for the most privacy and also to meet local setback requirements.

When remodeling a yard, Silva says, she looks carefully at the existing trees, shrubs and other features in hopes of keeping as many of the original elements as possible while creating something new and beautiful.

Many mature plants are worth saving; old patios can often be updated by saw-cutting the edges into new shapes and overlaying new materials onto the old gray concrete.

“I assume by ‘blah’ you mean boring, with little interest, color, or movement, and in need of a focal point,” she says. “That’s why I always try to create a feeling of intrigue, fun and mystery into

every yard, big or small, to make it truly special.”

One inexpensive and simple idea is to create a curvy path from one area to a decorative gate. Curved paths can be made of flagstone and ground cover, pavers, gravel or even a meandering piece of lawn. The gate can match the style of the home or be an eclectic, artistic, colorful one-of-a-kind feature.

“Whether it leads to a rose garden, a serene fountain and bench, a vegetable and herb garden or even just disguises a storage area, a gate creates a feeling of mystery and the illusion of much more space beyond it,” Silva says.

“Building the gate with an arbor to grow fragrant climbing mixed vines such as pink roses and lavender clematis would increase the color and your pleasure and joy in your yard even more.”

Silva included these elements in the backyard plan she recently completed for Wendy Wells and John Schimandle in Rocklin.

Although their half-acre lot backs up to Clover Valley Creek, a fence and a steep hill covered with blackberry brambles blocked their view of the creek. Many old, overgrown, diseased shrubs camouflaged the majestic oak trees and classic koi pond in their existing backyard.

The remodeling project will consist of tearing out the 40-year-old shrubbery, incorporating new



A curved path is a creative way to add interest to a yard, says Orangevale landscape designer Susan Silva. It can be made from a variety of materials. Among them: flagstone, pavers, gravel or even a meandering piece of lawn.

patio shapes and materials, installing a large, open lawn with curved borders, and planting colorful privacy shrubs and flowers. Covering a metal-screen fence with climbing vines will hide a storage shed, while removing the fence and terracing the hill leading down to the creek will open up the yard so it looks and feels larger.

“The highlight of the yard will be a new enclosed redwood deck perched over the creek for meditation and yoga,” says Silva. “A new curvy path made in a colorful mosaic pattern of tiles

will wind from Wendy’s yoga hut, past the koi pond, and lead to a new wooden gate and arbor covered with colorful, fragrant flowering vines.”

The new gate will connect the backyard to the side and front yards, which Silva redesigned for the couple several years ago.

Wells says they could only afford to install new landscaping in the front half of their lot the first time they hired Silva. They love the results so much, they know it was worth waiting to do the back.

“If you could see my front



“A gate creates a feeling of mystery and the illusion of much more space beyond it,” says Silva. An arbor planted with vines or a clematis will add color to the backyard feature.

yard you would know it was the work of a true artist, Wells says.

“When you drive down my street, you see many yards that look nice but very structured with all the standard stuff, while ours has a special touch that catches your eye. We have paved pathways that draw you to the front door of our home, unique plants that no one else has, and people who walk by constantly tell us our yard is so beautiful.”

Shade from all the trees in their side yard kept grass from

growing there, so they did nothing with that area until Silva turned it into a beautiful garden of ferns, hyd-rangeas and other shade-loving plants with a flagstone path in the middle, Wells says.

“From the street, you will be able to see past the intriguing new gate, inviting you into the backyard,” she says. “It will be beautiful walking under the trees and feel quiet and peaceful, like you’re in a little piece of the country. It will be magical, I know.”

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Susan Silva

owner, Susan Silva Landscape Design