



IN PERSON

MASTER OF THE PLAN



Kristopher Dabner's first paying job as a garden designer was to salvage a neighbor's do-it-yourself landscape gone bad. It was an early lesson in the value of planning before planting.

To avoid a similar gardening misstep, Dabner advises homeowners to draw up a long-term planting plan—the sort of plan he now does for clients of The Greensman, his garden design business in Kansas City, Missouri.

"Consider how outdoor spaces are to be used, now and in the future," Dabner says. "Also think of what's going to give you the most pleasure." Set aside space for later projects, such as the construction of a pool or gazebo. The plan can be broken into segments and prioritized. "Spreading the work and expense over several years allows you to do each part really well," he says.

Seek inspiration in the existing architecture. "More often than not, the house is the biggest feature of any piece of property," Dabner explains. "If the garden matches the house in style or materials, it makes the house seem bigger. The experience of the house is expanded out into the garden." For example, symmetrical boxwood-edged garden beds echo the interior layout of Colonial homes. A 1960s ranch calls for a contemporary garden with a sculptural plant, such as a Japanese maple or contorted filbert.

Don't forget hardscaping, which is the garden's permanent surfaces and structures. "Gardening is more than just plants. It's about the whole environment. You cannot underestimate the importance of having a really nice deck or patio or sidewalk or fountain. The plants have to be framed in the right setting."

The Greensman; 816/523-1516.

—Doug Hall