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Architectural Features in Small Gardens

By Margaret Jane Walker

A FOUNTAIN imposing enough for a Long Island estate, a sundial with too small a base, a heavy set of carved stone placed where there is no excuse for it except to furnish a good hard surface to bump into, a series of bird baths springing up like so many toadstools—these are a few of the mistakes frequently made in the placing of architectural features in small gardens.

Finding the proper location for these features is more difficult in a small garden than in a large one. Too often the statue, pool or whatever is the choice of the owner, dwarfs the rest of the garden. It has a tendency to appear larger and heavier than it did before being placed. A happy medium in using architectural features is difficult to obtain. There are usually either too many stone monuments or a complete absence of them. The lack of a feature to emphasize a major point of interest is as detrimental to a garden as are too many features.

Such mistakes as these are made because in most cases the amateur gardener has no definite plan of his garden worked out in scale on paper before the planting is started. A garden, to be successful, should contain the fundamental principles of design, unity, repetition, sequence and balance.

Architectural features help to unify the plan by tying the various parts together. Paths, when there are more than two intersecting, form a nice site for a sundial, providing there is ample room and it is the focal point of the main scheme or if not, does not detract from the major point of interest. A sundial is a fascination to all visitors and it gives even greater value to the lights and the shadows which are at all times a joy to the observer.

The sundial gives a meaning to gardens which are otherwise insipid and unnecessary. It provides a reason for their construction and existence. Don't misunderstand that sentence; under no condition plan a small garden which appears to be on earth simply to form a setting for an architectural feature. Leave that for the larger, more extensive estates. In your smaller plot all should be so united that the one brings out the best qualities of the other. The feature emphasizes the beauty and character of the garden and vice versa. Of course a sundial requires a rather formal scheme in its immediate surroundings.

Bird baths are interesting affairs, but

how they have been overdone! Common sense is about the best guide for the correct placing of a bird bath. Place it where the birds can use it with little fear of cats or such enemies. Other important facts to be considered are the views afforded the onlooker and its posi-



tion in relation to the surrounding landscape. Frequently the gardener is seemingly so concerned with the swimming facilities offered feathered visitors that bird baths spring up all over the lawn like overgrown toadstools. Use discretion, for the birds will find water if it is any place in their vicinity and if it is kept clean and plentiful in one bath the birds will not make any serious complaint concerning their accommodations.

The bird bath is a fine feature to use in emphasizing a particularly lovely group of planting. Although the plants serve as a background, they become more prominent because the eyes of the people are drawn to them at first by the lighter color of the bird bath.

Benches and various forms of seats are not often given as much thoughtful consideration as they require. In small gardens the wooden bench is the correct thing. A stone seat is usually out of character with both the house and the garden. It is to be used only in the largest places. Stone seats first appeared in great size in the grounds surrounding

old castles. It seems foolish to imagine that anyone could fit it in or cut it down to suit a small garden.

It is not necessary, as most people seem to think, to have all garden furniture a shining, clear white. Save your white paint and have your furniture a part of the garden, not just temporary articles which hit the eyes of the visitor before the beauty of the garden does. It is so difficult to realize that every item placed in the garden should be an intimate part of the complete scheme.

Water in a garden is one of the loveliest features. Small pools, simple in design, are among the most pleasing features with which to create interest in a garden. The quiet calm of even a very small pool gives added repose and charm to a garden. In some cases a jet is an addition. The sound of water is restful and lovely, but fountains are liable to be too large to incorporate in the design of anything but an immense plan. A pool can very easily form the axis upon which the rest of the garden turns. It can serve as the center of interest to which all paths lead. If it is so used no other feature as important in scale should be allowed to detract from the water. Recently there seems to have been a general adoption of pools of every form and size. The best rule to follow in the plan of a pool design is to have it as simple as is practicable. It is designed for the water in it, not to be conspicuous for its shape.

Steps appear only in small numbers in these gardens. If they are used, the more simple they are the better. Try and set them back in the ground so they will appear natural and not serve as an obstruction.

As for fences, gates and such, the same rules which apply to furniture fit them. Subdue that usual glaring white. Try and get them more like the surrounding planting—quiet green or the color of darkly stained wood. They bound the garden and make it an entire unified whole.

All these architectural features should serve a purpose which should be so related to the garden that it adds much charm and interest. Altogether they should form a lovely, interesting, quiet place so unified as not to distract the observer; rather should his eye progress naturally up through the minor details to the focal point and rest there pleased, perhaps surprised and above all satisfied.