

Appeal of the Aberrant®

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Discovering or creating a new form is fabulous. Successfully propagating it is immensely satisfying. Getting the public interested is sometimes the more difficult key to success.

While there is a growing percentage of savvy gardeners hooked on looking for unusual plant selections, there are lots who have no inkling. How to hook them?

One avenue is to make gardening unintimidating. At conferences I often listen to talks by garden designers or landscape architects who trot out lofty principles or rules, striking fear into listeners that they might do something tacky.

A few “rules” we should help to expunge:

- Never put a plant in the ground until you have a plan laid out on paper.
- Never buy a plant unless you know where it will go in your plan.
- Use plants with variegated or golden foliage minimally and with discretion.
- Plant in drifts, or at least in groups of threes or fives.

While there is a fine line between tacky and whimsical, playing with this line removes some of the fear factor that discourages the novice gardener, or even the experienced but “proper” gardener.

Turn the tables. Before the proper gardener can scorn the adventurous, poke (good hearted) fun at the proper gardener. Again, a fine line, because certain principles of design are found in any art form. When I teach landscape design, I make analogies to music. It is good to recognize a line of melody (a sort of structural unity) but too simplistic and repetitive is boring. Too much improvisation is irritating and disconcerting (jazz that gets so far from the original theme that nothing resembling it remains). Having some strong line and a few geometric structural elements will allow them to improvise to their heart’s content and still look “landscaped”.

Good ideas to promote experimentation:

- “Recycled” or inexpensive garden art (bicycles, old furniture, unusual use of paint, etc).
- “New plant” forums at varying events, both industry level and consumer level.
- Teach some master gardener classes, and influence will spread from them.

After all, it should be apparent that experimenting with new plants is much more fun!

“Without deviation from the norm, no progress is possible.” Frank Zappa, 1940–1993. American musician, composer, satirist.