

Garden Design and Plant Selection

Now that you have selected your project goals and learned about your site’s light and soil conditions, you can start designing your Stormwater Action Project.

A design shows the shape of your conservation garden and the placement of plants, trees, and shrubs. It usually is done on a grid, so that you can plan the garden dimensions and pick the right number of plants. As you draw the plants on the design, you will leave the appropriate amount of space between them. (Different plants need different amounts of growing space.) The design process usually takes a number of draft drawings, as you try out different garden shapes and different plants. Here are some design guidelines that might help:

- Have fun and trust your creative spirit.
- Have a mix of short, medium, and tall plants. Usually, short ones go in the front and tall ones in back.
- Select plants that bloom in different months, so you will have color throughout the season.
- Large groups of flowers are more dramatic than many small groups. A mix of large groupings and smaller ones draw a viewer’s attention.
- Odd numbers of plants are esthetically pleasing. Consider placing at least 5 together.
- A tree or shrubs can act as focal points or as backdrops, depending upon the site.
- The centers of perennial plants are usually 12 to 18 inches apart. Trees and shrubs are placed many feet apart. Their spacing will need to be researched.
- Clearly defined borders of a garden can bring unity to an informal shape.
- Repetition of flowers or colors throughout a garden keeps the eye moving while also tying the garden together.

Let’s Start Sketching

One way to start the design process is to use one of the shapes provided. You also can sketch your own, first using scrap paper and then the graph paper. Ask yourself:

- How big is the garden?
- Do you want an informal or formal garden?
- How will different shapes look in that area?

Sometimes, the easiest thing to do is to take a garden hose or rope to the garden site and experiment with different shapes, using the hose or rope to outline the garden.

Once you have a shape you like, decide if you want a color-themed garden, or not. For instance, you could use contrasting colors, such as yellows and purples with highlights of red, or you could have a garden of different shades of one color. Feel free to make several sketches to help you get an idea of the patterns and shapes you might like *within* your garden. Will you have a focal point, such as a bench, a tree, or bird bath? Do you want to hide a wall with tall grasses or bushes? Perhaps, it would be easier to make a sketch after you have looked at possible plants first. If so, go to the next section.

Other Ideas to Try

The shape of the garden can enhance the grounds by tying together elements, such as lone trees, or it can be a “centerpiece” in a plain, open space.

The shape of a garden can soften a “blocky” landscape with curves.

Your garden can match the colors of other gardens on the grounds, or it can stand apart as a special, themed garden to add interest to the grounds.

Your plan can include sitting places and paths to encourage students to visit the garden.

A garden can include signs, bird houses, or other art made by the students to establish a garden theme.

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Picking Plants

If you haven't done so already, you will use the [Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed booklet](#) to pick plants you find interesting and that meet the site requirements (<http://www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake/>).

Using colored pencils, start putting plants on your design. Represent each plant as a colored circle. Write the plant name and height in the circle, or make on a design key on the paper with this information. Use the gridlines and a scale to determine the spacing of the plants. A good eraser comes in handy during this part!

Your Notes from the Design Presentation Go Here.