

Plant Selection and Garden Design

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 garden shapes provided in this binder. You also can sketch your own shape, first using scrap paper and then the graph paper. Ask yourself:

- How big do you want the garden? Remember, you also have to weed and water it!
- Do you want an informal or formal garden?
- How will different shapes look in that area?

One of the easiest things to go outside and use a garden hose or rope to outline the garden. Experiment with different shapes and sizes.

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.

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](#) and other native plant web sites to pick plants you find interesting *and that meet the site requirements:* (<http://www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake/>).

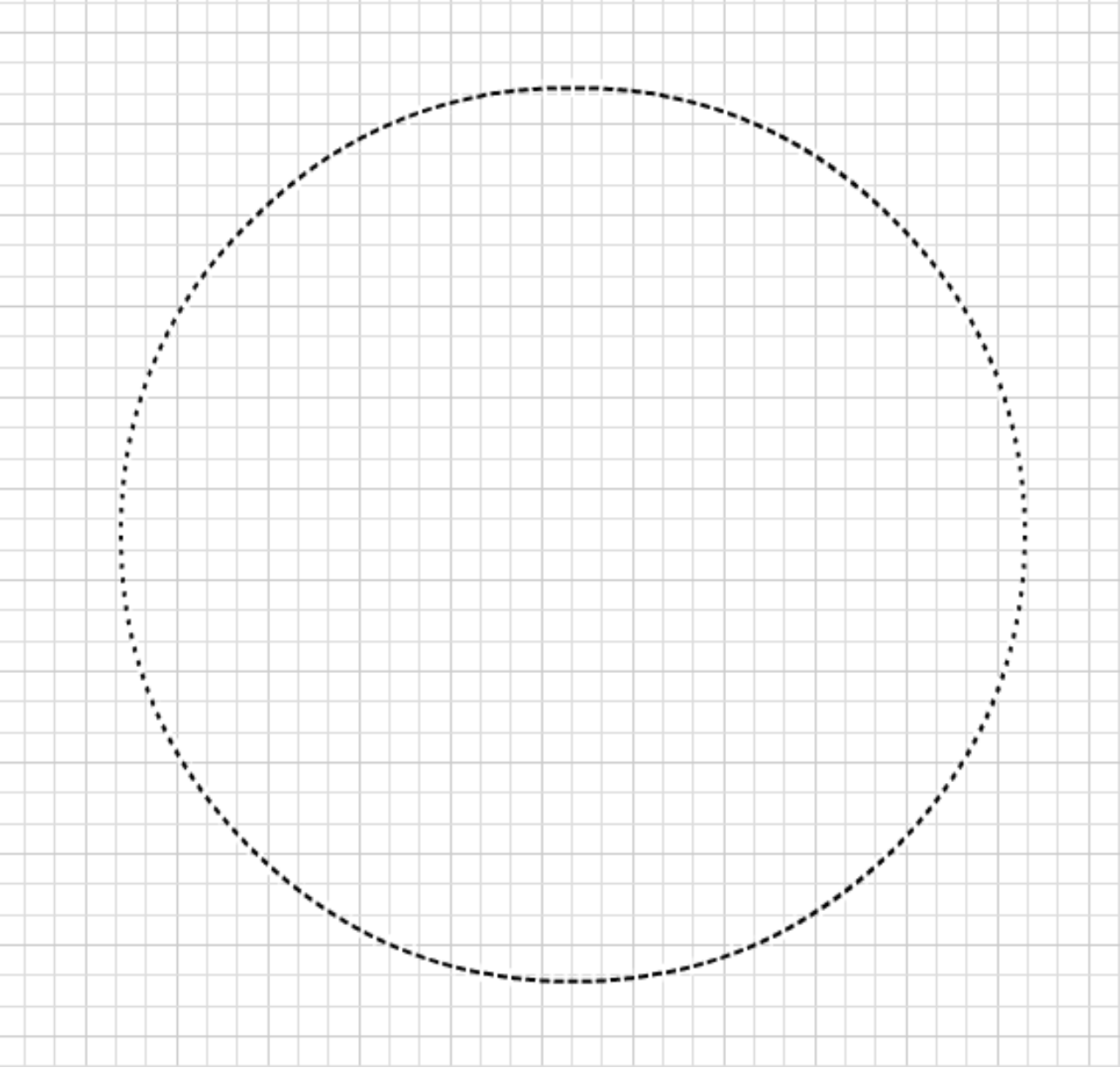
You will start with a sketch of your garden. You will make your sketches and final design on graph paper using colored pencils. This will be a planar view from above. (Some people need to envision their garden from a frontal view first, so if it helps, do that first, sketching in plant sizes and colors you find pleasing. Then switch to the graph paper.)

- Establish a scale for the gridlines before you start drawing. For instance, each square could represent 1 square foot or 5 square feet.
- On the graph paper, you will represent each plant in a circular or bubble shape that represents each plant's size at full growth.
- Write the plant name and height in the circle, or make on a design key or table on the side of the paper with this information.

A good eraser comes in handy during this part! It can take several drafts to come up with a good design.

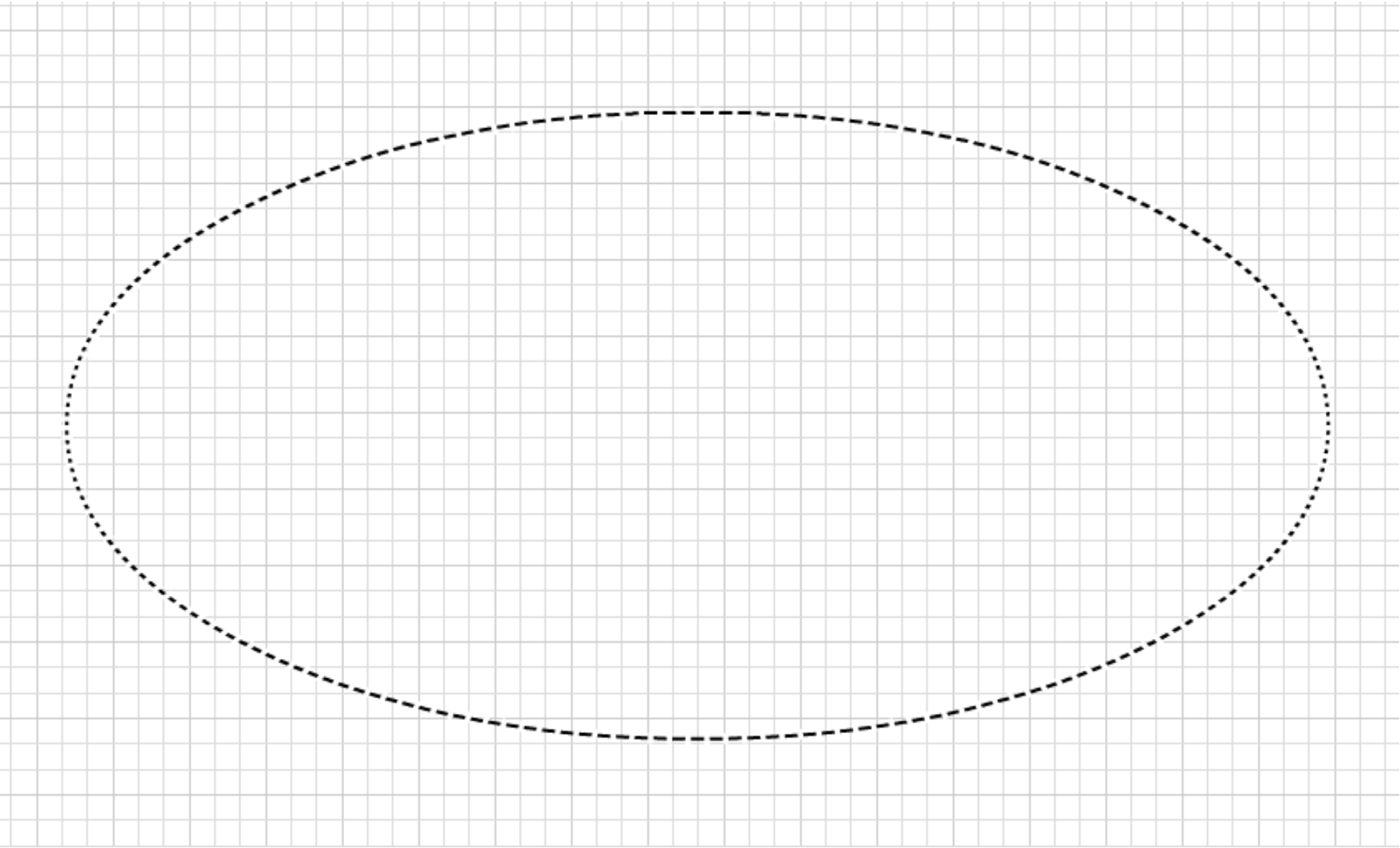
Notes from the Design Presentation Go Here.

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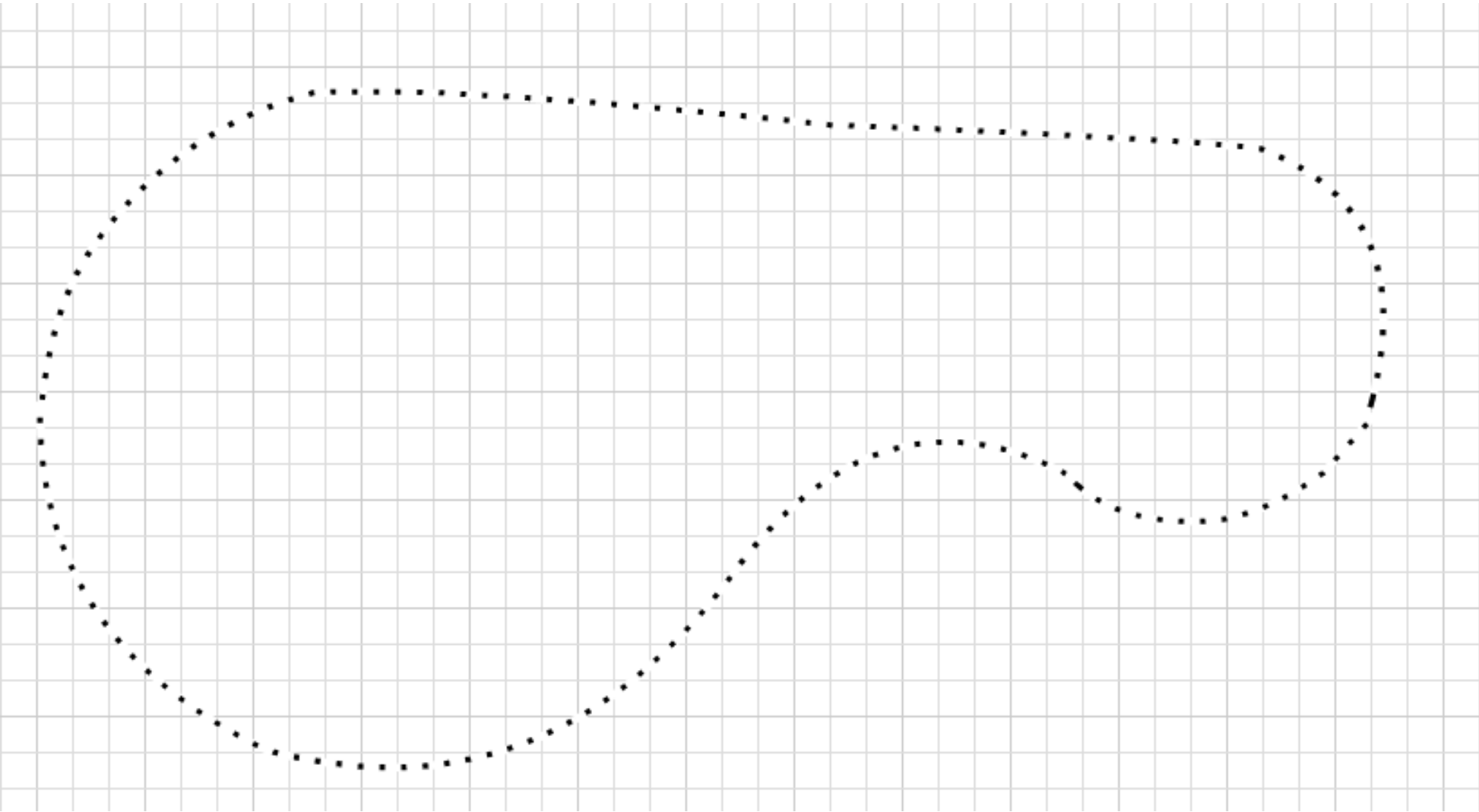
Each square = __ sq. ft.

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Each square = ___ sq. ft.

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Each square = ___ sq. ft.

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