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What makes a garden look good? Generally, you want shrubs and trees, plus grass to soften the hard, angular lines of your house and lot. Some people eliminate grass altogether and use a patio surrounded by beds. However, a flat sea of green grass add contrast for your shrub beds. Grass is also good if you have kids.

Cool grass on the sole of a bare foot in summer is a much savored treat. A few very tall things are essential to put your house in scale, or set it off, especially if it's a tall or big house. But you don't want so many tall things that they block all the light. A tall tree takes up a lot of space but it adds the element of 'grandeur.' A big tree goes on the south or west side to protect you from the blazing hot sun. It also adds habitat for kids and songbirds. Carve out your beds in gentle sweeps around the outside perimeter. Make them three times as big as you think you need them. The amount of grass you need is really quite small, maybe enough for six chairs and a picnic table or perhaps three beach towels. A 50/50 ratio of lawn to beds is recommended. If you are lucky enough to have a lot of land, you may wish to break it up into 'rooms' with shrub bed peninsulas or fences, the path winding from one 'room' to another.

These rooms are not square, they are just spaces that are separated, more or less. One of the

most pleasurable gardening experiences is that of mystery, as when you catch a glimpse of more garden around a corner or through a gate. To acquire this inviting air of mystery to your house, plant up the outside corners with your tallest trees and shrubs and have them descend to the entry to the street. This will mean that your landscape cups your house like an open hand. The broad openings, however, will invite you in and let in light. Another good thing to incorporate in your yard is having a truck access. At some point or another you will need to get a big couch to the back door or a cement truck or 6 yards of mulch. Even if this is a giant gate in your fence, which you open once in six years, be sure you have it. If the access is not big enough for a truck, then make it at least wide enough for a wheelbarrow.

Having a hidden utility area is also a very good idea. If your house is up a steep hill, you will want to build a rockery, which you can make special with good plant choices and stepped back rocks that leave you places to plant. If your whole area slopes steeply, you should seriously consider terracing, or rock or wall reinforcements. When landscape architects tell you the ground-cover will spread and hold the bank, they lie. All landscaping needs maintenance, or else the weeds will invade and prosper until you have a blackberry patch. And if it is too steep for you to walk on, this is what will happen.

Also erosion occurs with undeniable regularity on steep slopes. Keep in mind that gravity always wins. Having steep slopes means that the summer irrigation water runs off before it sinks into the soil. Steep slopes mean that all that expensive mulch that you spread to keep the weeds down will migrate down to the bottom in about a year, leaving bare spots above and a useless thick pile at the bottom. Invest the time and money to fix your steep grades now before starting your garden.