

GARDENS Four Seasons

GARDENDESIGN

July/August 2019

GRADE CHANGES in your Yard Part 1 - Existing Grade Changes

*“My green thumb came only as
a result of the mistakes I made
while learning to see things
from the plant's point of view. “*

- H. Fred Ale



hehe - one of my favourite sayings is - put the Right Plant in the Right Place & your battle is half won - kind of the same idea eh Mr. Ale?

One of the most memorable experiences I had with regard to elevation changes in a landscape occurred when I was recently helping a couple plan their new yard in Aspen Ridge. This new Saskatoon neighbourhood backs onto what is known as the Northeast Swale. A beautiful area, that I originally thought was largely bog, showed itself in the panoramic view from their living room window to be an amazing wild bit of prairie with gently sloping, rolling terrain as well as the wetland. Their panoramic view of the Swale became even more charming as the morning wore on & snow began to fall - creating a magical view most of us could only dream of. To



say we planned to take advantage of that view with their new landscape was an understatement! We can't all have such a wonderful vista but we can certainly take advantage of existing grade changes or create our own man made versions.

Most of us have lots that are relatively level with the only deviation from that being the necessary slope of the earth away from the foundation of your house or outbuildings. It is important to note that you can get the illusion of a terraced or multi-level effect just by varying the heights of plants in a bed. But if you'd like to shake things up a bit - consider adding a change in pitch at ground level.



- a bit of an 'island' bed on this slight bank

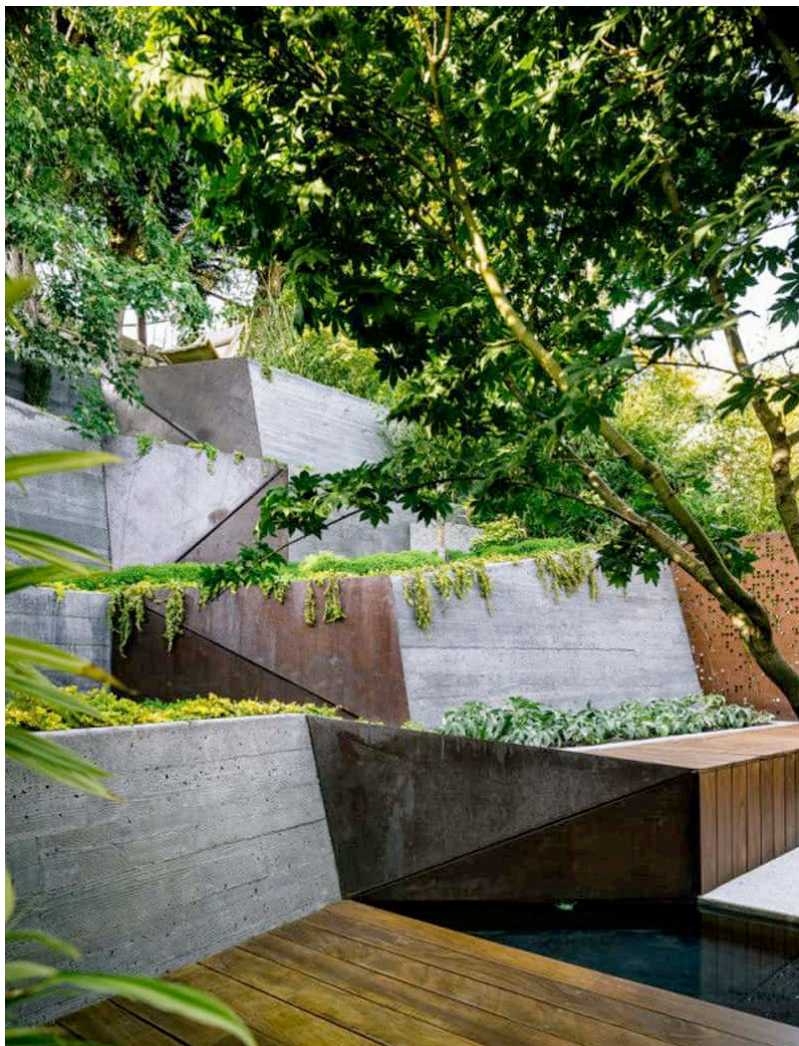
In this & the next GARDENDESIGN we'll delve into ideas for doing just that or even working with any elevation changes you may already have.

I consider a grade change to be any raised portion of your normally flat property - ie: soil that is sloped or terraced or rock gardens, manmade raised beds or retaining walls.

There are definite pros & cons to having or creating a grade change:

Pros

- can produce the illusion a given space is larger than it appears.
- create pleasing undulations for a 'visual playground' in any larger space.
- can make a yard feel like it has been there longer than it has thus giving that sense of maturity often yearned for in new neighbourhoods.
- constitutes a challenge for the person doing the planning &/or developing.
- gives you a yard unique from most (particularly in Stoon!)



Cons

- it adds to the cost & time & effort in terms of developing or altering your terrain.
- proposed changes in elevation &/or existing elevations must be carefully planned beforehand to prevent drainage issues from arising.
- can create difficulty in traversing the terrain depending on your degree of mobility (but on the other hand can make it easier - ie: steps, terracing, etc.)
- maintenance can be a bit trickier (ie: mowing a sloped lawn or clambering up a hilly rock garden) to weed. I can attest to feeling a bit like a Mountain Goat attempting to maintain my little rock garden - how do those goats do it?!



So are you one of the lucky ones who has an existing grade change - either sloping towards your home or away from it?

Nice! I have found typically any slopes in Saskatoon gardens are at the back of the property so we'll concentrate on that scenario. Front sloping yards can benefit by simply reversing the ideas to suit the property.

An incline or decline at the back affords you the option of cutting into it & removing some earth in order to compose a more useable plane.



- here the hill has been cut into & had a portion removed to facilitate the installation of a patio. The retaining wall creates a stunning backdrop. The bottom portion was actually extended so there is a

couple of steps down to the ground level.

Or you can always set up a terraced effect - this usually allows easier access for maintenance & a nice stroll in the garden.



Or maybe, just maybe you want to use a combination of terraced, steps & a gradual spill of lawn.



Perhaps you want to develop that ramp-like bit without disturbing it's gentle slope. This tactic works well for lawns or rock gardens.



- I just wanna roll down this sunny grassy knoll!



Once you've decided on how you'd like to use your slope - take note of the following *necessary* considerations:

- ensure it is sloped properly away from building foundations & does not interfere with any existing natural or required drainage flow, either in your yard or neighbouring properties.
- do not pile soil past the concrete parging (or foundation) of your building. Earth touching any siding, stucco or stone surfacing on your house can lead to rot or varmint issues.



- if you want to pile earth higher than your foundation height ensure you use a waterproofed barrier of either concrete, brick or pressure treated wood act as a back drop.
- raised beds or anything requiring holding back the dirt should be built no higher than 3' without seeking the services of a qualified engineer or landscape professional.

- construct heightened or terraced levels where water runoff will not create a problem. Drainage should always be foremost in your mind when planing any changes in soil elevation. You don't want to have a section that ends up having it's base constantly in a pool of water - unless of course you WANT a bog garden (but Hey! that's another topic for another day:)

Next issue - I'll offer ideas to actually CREATE some grade changes. Until then - Adios!



READER FEEDBACK

“Another fantastic & informative read Denise!”

- Rose (commenting on the SHADE GARDENING issue of GARDENDESIGN - May/June 2019)



- awe shucks - Thanks Rose!



PLANT OF THE MOMENT

SEM False Spirea - *Sorbaria sorbifolia* 'Sem'

A fairly new introduction on the Hort scene - Sem Spirea produces lush, fern like foliage with a bit of a reddish tinge that



matures to a chartreuse green. The foliage really shines in Autumn tho' when it turns vibrant shades of red & orange. In addition, it produces fluffy white blossoms in June. Growing to about 4' high, it has a full look & will spread anywhere you

allow it. There is the rub - plant them only in a space where their suckering habit won't be a concern.

Their hardiness rating of zone 2 serves them well - I've had one survive an entire winter in an above ground pot in a very exposed area! They thrive in pretty much any condition & do well in dry shade beneath Spruce Trees.



- Sem Spirea - Autumn Colour

The common name - False Spirea - indicates that while not of the Spirea genus, it is every bit as versatile. It is a perfect example to illustrate my belief that using the right plant in the right place makes a huge difference in its success! (sorry - I just HAD to tie that in with my opening quote ;)



DESIGN BRILLIANCE

Simply exquisite take on a small rear yard Grade Change - don't you agree?

It is a constant source of amazement to me how adding a few levels can make a space appear larger.



In the next issue of

GARDENDESIGN
September/October 2019

We'll check out **GRADE CHANGES - Part 2**
Adding Grade Changes

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Order :)
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time around.



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