

General Planning Information

INTRODUCTION

This step-by-step workbook for better home gardens and landscapes is based on doing a site assessment. Site assessment involves collecting detailed data about the physical characteristics of your garden or landscape. This information will enable you to make better decision later. It is inspecting a site to learn more about its ability to support healthy plant growth. It prevents costly replacement and labor costs. It is that often-overlooked or shortchanged first step in building a garden or landscape.

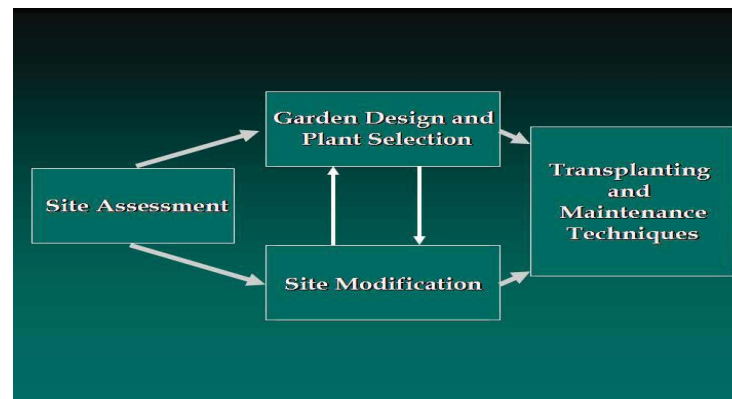
Site assessment reveals plant stress factors. Plants experience stress when their oxygen, water, light, nutrient, carbon dioxide and appropriate temperature requirements are not met. Site assessment allows you to account for these factors before problems get out of hand.



Site assessment is a discovery. Doing these steps will assist you in:

- Selecting appropriate plants for your site
- Preventing plant disease problems
- Saving money
- Identifying plant stress

Is it something that has to be done to have a successful garden or landscape? We think so, although there are probably examples of success without a site assessment. It's like any risk. If you discover a factor in a site assessment, you cope better with it and make an informed decision.



Site assessment precedes garden design, plant selection, site modification and transplanting/maintenance.

Should it be done only for perennial herbaceous and woody plants or can it be done for annual flowers, herbs and vegetables?

It can be done on all parts of your garden or landscape -- on any size property or section of it.

Can it be done on a corner or other section of the garden only? You can focus on *study areas* or sections of your property. Keep in mind that some of the physical factors you will discover about your garden are not restricted to one section alone. It would be better to do an overall garden/landscape's site assessment, but if your goals are to develop or improve one section, then assessing a study area makes sense.

How can it prevent plant diseases? Stress factors make plants more vulnerable to disease. For instance, lack of oxygen in roots in compacted, soil, poorly-drained soil stresses plants and makes plant disease organisms more likely to develop. Many plants set into damp, shady sites are more susceptible to diseases. Some plants, which are highly susceptible to diseases and insect pest problems, are inherited from previous property owners. These can be replaced with pest-resistant or robust varieties.

How should I pace the project? You can do it in a short period of time over a few weeks or spread the steps out over six-months to a year so that you are doing one or two steps a

month. Estimated time is included with the description of each step.

It takes around 8 hours and about 30 material items to do all the steps in a site assessment. Most are household items or are inexpensive.

If you stretch out your site assessment over a 6-12 month period, do most of it during the growing season. Doing the steps on hardiness, wires and obstructions, wind and putting it all together can be done in the winter months. Of course, you can only put it all together after you have done the other steps.

When should it be done?

- Before gardening or landscaping on newly acquired property
- When expanding into a new part of the property or refurbishing an older section

What do I do when my assessment suggests that I make a change? If a step shows that you need to correct a stress, you can't always stop and deal with at that point. But plan when you will do it. Some changes you need to make are simple and can be done in a few hours. Other changes might involve an expense of time and money to do them effectively; those might be done later.

