

Professional Planting Design

Suggested Course Syllabus and Teaching Modules

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Note to instructors:

This syllabus is not copyrighted and is intended to be used freely by academic professionals as a supplement to the book, *Professional Planting Design—An Architectural and Horticultural Approach to Mixed Bed Planting*, authored by Scott C. Scarfone, ASLA. Having a format based on the organization of the book, the syllabus can be used as a foundation, along with additional support exercises and projects, for a semester-long planting design course or be used as modules integrated into other design courses during several semesters.

Required Texts:

Professional Planting Design—An Architectural and Horticultural Approach to Mixed Bed Planting; By: Scott C. Scarfone, ASLA; ISBN # 978-0-4717-6139-6

Planting Design, Second Edition; By: Theodore D. Walker; ISBN # 0-471-29022-X

Course Objectives:

1. Improve your understanding of the principles and process involved in planting design specifically mixed bed planting types.
2. Increase your awareness of the appreciation of the various design features of individual plants and plant compositions.
3. Train your eye to perceive basic design principles as applied to planting compositions.
4. Illustrate a process through which you can apply this training to your own planting designs.

*Note: All reading assignments are to be completed **PRIOR** to class.*

Planting is like painting a landscape with living things.

—Gertrude Jekyll

Suggested Modules

Module #1 Design Basics: Weeks 2-4

Module #2 Understanding Plants as the Design Medium: Week 1, Weeks 5-7, Week 10, and Weeks 12-13

Module #3 Application to the Landscape: Week 3, Week 9, and Weeks 14-15

Suggested Course Syllabus

Week #1—Planting Design Basics

Reading Assignment

Walker: pages 2, 5-18, 20-22, 33-55, and 57-69

Scarfone: pages 2-17 in Introduction, and 21-36

- a. Introduction
 1. Planting design as a process
 2. Problem solving
 3. Functional vs. aesthetic
 4. Artistic
- b. Functional Uses of Plants
 1. Visual control
 2. Physical barriers
 3. Climate control
 4. Noise control
 5. Erosion control
- c. Components of the Mixed Planting
- d. The Mixed Planting Composition
 1. Planting bed types/functions
 2. Planning for succession

At the design stage the choice of plants is unimportant, except that they serve as material for the composition. A collection of plants is not a landscape, any more than a list of choice words is a poem.

—Nan Fairbrother

Week #2—Elements of Composition

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 38-54

- a. Line
- b. Form
- c. Mass
- d. Visual Weight
- e. Texture
- f. Color

Week #3—Design Principles

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 54-68

- a. Design Principles
 1. Scale/proportion
 2. Balance
 3. Repetition/rhythm
 4. Emphasis/focal point
 5. Unity
 6. Variety

The beauty of style and harmony and grace and good rhythm depend on simplicity.

—Plato

Week #4—Design Principles

Reading Assignment

Walker: pages 83-116

Scarfone: pages 54-68

- a. Line
- b. Shape/Form
- c. Texture
- d. Color theory

Week #5—Plants as the Medium: Understanding Compositional Elements

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 70-100

- a. Design Principles—Implications on Planting Design
- b. Using Different Plant Types for Structure
 1. Trees
 2. Shrubs
 3. Evergreens
- c. Plant Forms
- d. Seasonal Characteristics
 1. Bark/twigs
 2. Flowers
 3. Seed heads
 4. Fruits/berries
 5. Foliage

A designer's concern should not be exclusively focused on the creation of beauty. Instead he/she should investigate the contribution plants can serve in solving problems associated with the site and its landscape spaces.

—Theodore D. Walker

Week #6/7—Form Based Approach to Planting Design

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 102-123

- a. Understanding Form Relationships
- b. Creating the Abstract Composition
- c. Grouping and Arranging
- d. Creating Mass
- e. Characteristic Study
- f. Evaluating the Composition

Form, color, texture and shape are characteristic features of the material used, and indiscriminate mixtures cancel each other out like music of a fairground, or two radios playing together. When the mixture is not indiscriminate some of the most subtle and satisfying effects are produced...

—Nan Fairbrother

Week #8—Designing in Plan View

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 123-145

- a. Going Horizontal
- b. Developing Plant Masses
- c. Creating Beds
- d. Determining Bed Depth

Week #9—Developing a Design Theme

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 145-174

- a. Developing a Design Theme
 1. Aesthetic
 2. Plan
- b. Geometry of Forms
- c. Using a Grid

Week 10—Composing and Structuring

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 176-186

- a. Layering
- b. Locating Structure Plants

Week #11—Composing and Structuring

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 187-202

- a. Building the Composition
 1. Theme plants
 2. Accent/focal points
 3. Infill/filler plantings
- b. Importance of Massing

Week #12—Understanding the Planting Environment

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 203-206, 238-250

- a. Factoring in Maintenance
- b. Soils
- c. Exposure
- d. Water Requirements
- e. Nutrient Requirements
- f. Plants Grow!

Week #13—Selecting the Plants

Reading Assignment

Scarfone: pages 203-233

- a. Deciding on the Plant Mix
- b. Specifying Plant Characteristics
- c. Choosing the Plants
- d. Evaluating the Composition
 1. Form
 2. Texture
 3. Color
 4. Seasonal variation

Week #14—Relating Planting Design to a Site Design

Reading Assignment

Walker: pages 71-83, 121-150

Scarfone: reread pages 161-174

- a. Relating Planting Design to Site
 1. Site analysis
 2. Functional concept
 3. Borrowed landscape
- b. Developing and Using a Grid

The success of the design will depend largely on these four fundamental principles; unity, which is the consideration of the scheme as a whole, both the house and garden; function, which is the relation of the practical service areas to the needs of the household and the relation of the decorative areas to the desires and pleasure of those who use it; simplicity, upon which rest both the economic and aesthetic success of the layout; and scale, which gives us a pleasant relation of parts to one.

—Thomas Church

Week #15—Applying the Processes to Reality

Reading Assignment: None – Handout exercises by Professor

- a. Application to Building Elevation
- b. Aesthetic Applications of Composition
- c. Applications for Reality

The choice of the plants is influenced by their fit with the setting; the relationship to the shapes of the building and ground; their apparent harmony with climate and native vegetation.

—Kevin Lynch