



Designing a Garden with Strong Plant Shapes

By Ginny Landes

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

Do you ever look at your garden and wonder if even though it's colorful, it's lacking interest? A well-designed garden has balance, definition, form and structure. Plants with a variety of shapes and different heights add an element of interest. Too many plants the same height lack definition, and can look monotonous with no change in pace.

Thinking in terms of the geometric shapes of plants will provide structure and interest in the overall look. Cones, globes, mounds, spikes, fountains and mats are plant shapes that give a garden substance and depth.

Plants with cone shapes are broad at the base and taper to a point. They provide stability and carry weight in a garden. Examples are: Arborvitae (Thuja) and Dwarf Alberta Spruce (Picea Glauca).

Globes look well with spikes and fountains providing good contrast. Many shrubs can be pruned into this shape if not grown naturally as a globe. Examples are: evergreen shrubs Boxwoods (Buxus), deciduous shrubs Barberry (Berberis) and Rosaceae (Spiraea); a blooming perennial example is Alliums (Allium).

Mounding-type plants also carry weight, but are softer and lower. They could be used to define and balance each end of the garden border. Examples are: Japanese Maples (Acer Palmatum 'Crimson Queen') and Plantain Lily (Hosta).

Plants with spikes provide height and variety to a garden. They are useful to contrast with mounds and globes. Examples are: Feather Reed Grass (Calamagrostis) and blooming perennials Red Hot Pokers (Kniphofia), and Speedwell (Veronica).

Fountain shaped plants are generally narrow at the base and flare at the top, and these add interest and grace to the garden. Examples are: Ornamental Grasses (*Miscanthus*) and Daylilies (*Hemerocallis*).

Plants that are mat-forming lie low, and they tie the garden to its site. Examples are: low spreading Junipers (*Juniperus*) and Thyme (*Thymus*).

When designing a garden, geometric plant shapes like cones globes, mounds, spikes, fountains and mats create definition and structure. Their variety is key to keeping a garden interesting and delightful.

There is no Master Gardener class this Saturday, May 24. Enjoy our beautiful outdoors and your garden this 2014 Memorial Day Holiday weekend, with pause to reflect and remember those who have died in service to our country.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local farmers markets and in their office at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville from Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Walk-ins are welcome, or call [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at [http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC Master Gardeners/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/). Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.