

Garden Inspiration

Where can we get our inspiration from to turn our ordinary yards into the gardens of our dreams? With current computer technology it's easy to search for photos and DIY weekend projects using apps such as Instagram, Pinterest and Houzz. We can also do it the old fashioned way and flip through our favourite gardening books and magazines. We can even get inspired on our winter getaways. Stepping off the plane in tropical climates can bombard all of our senses, and viewing gardens in much warmer climates can leave us wishing we lived somewhere else; almost anywhere warmer than Manitoba in January. Let's face it, it's been a long winter, and for some of us that means we've had lots of time to dream big! So big, in fact, that maybe instead of feeling inspired you're feeling overwhelmed!

In January, I visited beautiful Balboa Park, a 1,200 acre urban cultural park located in San Diego. It consists of over 10 theme gardens, a variety of museums and the San Diego Zoo. Known for its collection of rare animals, the zoo also maintains an arboretum containing a rare collection of trees from around the world – over 700,000 plants in the zoo alone! My favorite area in the park was the two-acre Japanese Friendship Garden. Talk about inspiration!

Just how do we transfer these grand ideas that we've enthusiastically gathered and make them a reality...in a Manitoba garden? The same way the San Diego Zoo planted its arboretum – one tree at a time. So let's break it down.

Here's a photo I took of the Japanese Gardens.



I love the koi, pond but most people don't have the time or money to incorporate this into their yards. So let's grass that area over. That would work. (Please forgive my elementary attempt at Photoshop, but hopefully you get the idea.)



What if the thought of mowing, watering and weeding the lawn makes you cringe? How does a riverbed without the upkeep and maintenance of water sound to you? A dry river bed can be installed to fool the eye into believing that water actually flows through the area (just not that moment), or it can be used to divert water during a fast melt and heavy rains.



Begin by laying down several inches of river stone. To create a more realistic looking river, or if you intend to divert water, dig a small trench that roughly (never perfectly!) follows the curves of the 'river banks'.

Look at how Mother Nature creates a river and learn from the random arrangement of rocks, or have a look at this photo I took of another area within the same Japanese garden.

Do you see the random placement and the different sizes of rocks? At the same time, do you see that the similar type of rock is consistent throughout the entire riverbed? For example, granite boulders, flagstone and tyndall stone are not mixed together in the same bed. Also look at the placement of the plants. All of these factors must be considered to produce the same effects that Mother Nature creates.

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Let's go back to the first photo and discuss plant selection.

In the foreground there are three varieties of evergreens – dwarf mugo pine, globe cedar and juniper. We can grow all those here! Just choose plants that remain small even when mature.



What about that craggy looking leafless plant on the right? A double flowering plum – *Prunus triloba* 'Multiplex' or a muckle plum – *Prunus x nigrella* 'Muckle' would be perfect, and its pink spring blossoms would be a great substitute for the cherry trees found in Japanese gardens.

Now look at the background. The yellow twigs are actually bamboo, but a yellow twigged dogwood such as *Cornus alba* 'Bud's Yellow' would work. To create the same upright form, prune, when required, by thinning out (removing old growth near soil level) rather than heading back (pruning branches part way up the stem).

There is also a tree in the background with white bark. A paper birch would be suitable, but consider its moisture and nutrient requirements and also its susceptibility to insects and disease. Any tree with interesting bark of any colour could be substituted. There are several varieties of amur chokecherry – *Prunus maackii* – that all have a copper bark. Some have bark that flakes off similar to paper birch and all show a high resistance to black knot disease.

So instead of being overwhelmed with creating the garden of your dreams, just like with any big building project, it helps to break each step into manageable processes. It's physically impossible for one person to plant two trees at a time, so why would you expect to plan and install an entire garden in one stage? Your dreams really can become a reality. One step at a time – one tree at a time!

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