

GIE+EXPO

The GREEN INDUSTRY and EQUIPMENT EXPO

Session I: Sustainable Design of the Mixed Garden with Tracy DiSabato-Aust by Tom Crain



Tracy DiSabato-Aust, Ohio-based author of *The Well-Designed Mixed Garden*, *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* and the soon-to-be-released *50 High-Impact, Low-Care Garden Plants*, believes in the importance of asking a series of key questions to dig up clients' gardening objectives prior to digging out their garden.

"There are so many functional considerations for a garden," she explained. "You need to get into your client's head. Do they want cut flowers from their garden? Do they want it to attract birds, butterflies and other wildlife? Will it be the focus of their entertaining or a private meditative retreat? Do they want it showcased by day with afternoon teas or spotlighted by night with dinners by the grill?"

During her two-part presentation at the 2008 GIE Expo, DiSabato-Aust continued to plant a furrow of questions for landscapers to consider when planning a sensational mixed garden for clients. :

She reminded them not to forget budget and maintenance factors: "Can they afford to treat their soil properly or feature any added yard art or water features? Do clients want the garden to be therapeutic? Or, do they travel half the year and need a garden that basically takes care of itself?"

Digging for Clues

"Clients bring us in for our professionalism so it is your responsibility to steer them in the right direction," said DiSabato-Aust. "The garden you design should reflect who your clients are and what they want. Often, they don't even know what they want. It is your job to not only inspire, but educate them. Raise awareness of their site limitations. Availability of light, type of soil, amount of moisture, contour of the land and exposure to the elements can dictate a lot about what you are able to do for them."



The design process is quite a balancing act to not only satisfy clients' wants and needs, but also to make environmentally-sound choices.

The most ideal way that DiSabato-Aust learns her clients' style and color palette is to check out the interior of their home. Color used in the home usually shows homeowners' color preferences and tastes. "Even checking out their wardrobe is not beyond reproach," she said. "You should always be searching for

important visual clues about them."

While in the home, DiSabato-Aust suggested one pay close attention to the outlook from the inside: "The garden's visibility from the interior windows is crucial because this is where client spends much of their time. It could be the home office, balcony—even the kitchen sink."

Design Elements

To create a phenomenal garden is to thoroughly consider all the design elements and how they interact with one another: color, form, texture and function.

On Color

DiSabato-Aust believes that most garden enthusiasts are obsessed with color, so it's easy to underplay all of the other important design elements. A colorful garden is certainly eye-catching, but it should be created with consideration to all the other design elements.

Color schemes can vary: monochromatic, analogous (harmonious), complementary (contrasting), and polychromatic, to name a few. It's a wonderful thing when a garden's color scheme alternates throughout the seasons. Maybe it's soothing pastels in spring, vivid intensities in summer and muted earth tones in fall.

On Form

Form takes on many things: the outline of leaves, grouping of the plants, and varying heights between the woody and herbaceous vegetation.

Scale and proportion are an important consideration. Gardens should be neither too big nor too small and plantings should be proportionate to buildings and other property features.

Gardens don't have to look good all the time, but you should ensure that throughout the year, various sections of the garden play off each other, alternating peaks of high interest throughout the entire year.

