



This story is about the creation of a very special garden room or garden sanctuary. This space in the garden is all about a peaceful and quiet retreat. Sometimes in a secret location, a garden sanctuary is a place you create to rest in, relax, hide, dream, and forget the cares of the world.

creating a garden

SANCTUARY

BY DAVID DUNN





I think that all too often we visualize traditional sunny borders, or large expanses of grass with a few trees and shrubs, as the typical garden. For me, gardening encompasses many forms: water gardens, rock gardens, dry gardens, alpine gardens, and so on. While these forms of gardening hold many great characteristics, they are always designed to be “looked at”. A garden should also be designed to “be in”

One reads about creating garden rooms. This is the opportunity to create a sense of space, and a garden that is connected to other gardens through walkways, but is also separated by walls, plantings or structures in a manner creating the feel of a separate room of the garden. As you begin to add complexity to a garden through the creation of various garden rooms, you can also add various themes, and colour schemes, and planting techniques. Each room will also need to respond to the light conditions, soil conditions and degree of exposure it has.

Location

Where do you put such a sanctuary? The best option is to find a part of your garden that already has a sense of enclosure, and is positioned away from street noise and the hustle and bustle of daily life. You want to be able to hear the birds and smell the roses in your retreat.

Character

The nature of the retreat you create will respond to the character of the site. Is it sunny or shaded? Is there water there? The best retreats will be oriented such that there is a natural screen of prevailing winds. Taking these conditions into account, a selection of plant materials responding to the quality of light and soil will be the building blocks for your garden.

Sense of Place

The most important element of design for your sanctuary is the creation of a sense of place. You can do this by ensuring it has a sense of enclosure. It also needs a clear entry. Enclosure and entry build the room, and the addition of a strong focal point makes it a special place. This can be art, or water in the form of a pond, or a very ornamental plant. You may choose to use an ornamental garden design such as a knot garden to be the anchor. Whatever you choose, a focal point moves the garden into a different role and character. In my garden, I have used a large weeping cedar as one focal point. In another garden, it's a fountain.

A Resting Point

Now that you have created this special secret retreat, you need to be able to enjoy it. Your design must include a chair, or bench positioned in a way to take advantage of the quiet privacy, and also celebrate the focal point. You need to remember to take those quiet moments in your retreat to just soak up the beauty of nature, to rest and to dream! Remember to ensure the seating arrangement is comfortable, so you're not in a rush to leave.

Simplicity

At the Ramble, there is a point in the garden we call the Cathedral. It is on a knoll of old Red Pine. The forest floor is a pristine red carpet of needles. The Pine stand tall, like the columns of a church. We placed a bench within this special quiet place, and it becomes a special sanctuary at the end of one of the trails. A simple, quiet joy.

Added Hints

The best way to enjoy your garden sanctuary is when you're not thinking about the clean up or the weeding that



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your garden into
a place to be,
not a thing to look at.



must be done. Choose a design and plant material that will be as carefree as possible. Rely heavily on mulch to keep the moisture up and the weeds down... This way your plants will look better longer into the season, with less effort.

Think about evolving your garden to be a place to be, not a thing to look at. I guarantee that you will begin to see and experience all kinds of opportunity in shaping and growing your special sanctuary. ☀

David Dunn is a co-owner/operator of Rideau Woodland Ramble which is open April 20th thru mid-November, 7 days a week, from 9 to 6. Come Ramble! There's no admission.



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