

# How's That View?

By Barbara Ballinger | 25 January 2010 @ 04:48 pm EDT

How's the View from Out There? Using a few outdoor design elements, sellers can give their exterior all-around appeal.

Sellers today are walking their property in buyers' shoes-and giving their exterior all-around appeal. Here are 10 ways to add exterior flair.

## 1. Mobile gardens



One way to extend gardening enjoyment is to plant in pots, which can be easily carried or wheeled indoors when weather turns chilly. What goes into the pots can vary from flowers to vegetables, herbs, and ornamental grasses. "This trend gives home owners plants for decoration or consumption all year," says Valerie Torelli, founder of Torelli Realty in Costa Mesa, Calif., who calls her 36-inch mobile pots that she wheels to sellers' listings Torelli Portaplants. Mobile pots add other advantages, she says: They can solve problems-create a barrier when lined up-or be moved to another location when sellers move.

Perfect for owners who enjoy maintaining plants all year.

## 2. Ground cover and ornamental grasses instead of lawn



More home owners are looking for alternatives to high-maintenance, water-guzzling lawns. "Sustainability is the buzzword in yard care," says John Algozzini, director of design and creative services at Kinsella Landscape, in Blue Island, Ill. Practical suggestions from his colleague, landscape architect Erin Canterbury, are **bella bluegrass**, Legacy and Prestige buffalo grass, creeping lily turf (*Liriope spicata*), barren strawberry, and low-growing thyme. For those who still want some lawn, Batchelor suggests a meadow mix, which requires infrequent mowing, sometimes just once a season.

Great for conservationists and busy people.

### 3. Vegetable gardens



Choose a sunny spot; include vegetable favorites, a few new types (600 variations of heirloom tomato seeds are listed at [www.heirloomtomatoes.bizland.com](http://www.heirloomtomatoes.bizland.com)), some herbs, edible flowers, and a border to keep it all looking neat, and you've got a vegetable garden to rival Michelle Obama's at the White House. To keep animals away, carefully pick plants they're not interested in or use sprays that send them scurrying yet don't hurt the edibles, says landscape architect Clara C. Batchelor, principal of CBA Landscape Architects in Somerville, Mass. Deer, for instance, tend to avoid blue and northern sea oat grass and liriopse. If you must, consider fencing in the garden with a material that relates to the house and any hardscape, and plant it with flowers or vines to camouflage it a bit.

Appeals to chefs and locavores.

### 4. Adventurous path to the door



Even if it's a short walk to the front door, it doesn't have to be boring. Handsome natural materials, such as brick or slate, or one of the new resilient perennials that tolerate foot traffic well ([www.stepables.com](http://www.stepables.com)) can be accented at the beginning, end, or along the way with attractive plants or sculpture to create an aesthetically pleasing journey. Algozzini thinks a rectilinear walk with a few right angles offers more adventure than a curved one; he softens straight lines with plants that feather over edges. Canterbury likes to introduce a curve or two, maybe with a fountain or bench, for a pause. Laurie Van Zandt of The Ardent Gardener in Huntsville, Utah, enjoys adding fragrant smells such as lavender and mint.

A wow for owners who hate ho-hum treatments.

## 5. Small topiaries and dwarf trees



Artistic and charming, small topiaries and dwarf trees can be paired or used in a grouping in front of a walkway, door, or architectural feature to lend a more formal mood, says landscape designer Michael Glassman of Sacramento, Calif. The downside: more maintenance and thus greater expense, says Van Zandt. Almost horizontal Mary Potter crabapple trees are among Van Zandt's favorites because they're "super showy in spring and loaded with berries."

Right for those seeking a whimsical focal point.

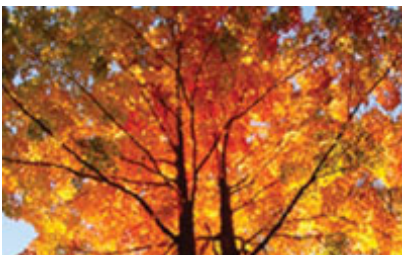
## 6. Year-round color, texture, and shape



Enjoyment of trees, shrubs, flowers, and ground cover shouldn't be limited to spring and summer when flowers bloom and greenery grows lush. The right choices display vivid leaf colors, plump berries, interesting bark, and sculptural branches all year. Van Zandt recommends ornamental grasses since they grow in a range of colors from green, blue, reddish purple, or buff in spring and summer to red, orange, or tan in fall. They also require minimal care. Cut them down in early spring, and they'll start to grow and flourish, says Batchelor.

A must for sellers in four-season climates.

## 7. Mature trees



Trees take time to mature, but home owners who need instant curb appeal are in luck. Many nurseries have recently had excess crop, which allows them to lower their prices for what has traditionally been an expensive garden

choice, says Algozzini. A caveat to sellers, he says: Consider how much taller a tree will grow, since you don't want it blocking sunlight or views of the house from the curb, or of the exterior from inside. When planting trees, leave room between them for future growth and pick those with a final height that fits the yard and home's scale, adds Canterbury.

A solution for spots where saplings just won't do.

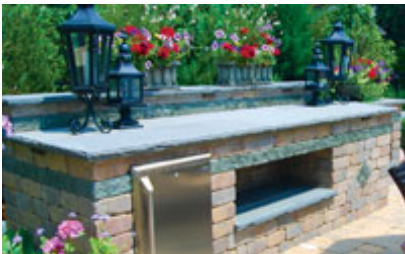
## 8. Mix of hardscape materials



With the unmatched look considered chic in interior decor, it was only a matter of time before the trend flourished outdoors. Why have only brick when you could pair it with limestone? Landscape design pros recommend complementary materials that share a common denominator-perhaps scale, color, or texture-and limiting the number of materials, since too many confuse a display. Algozzini suggests borrowing a choice or two from a home's exterior.

Great for stone lovers.

## 9. Architectural features



Outdoor architectural components can add a focal point in the way that fireplaces, columns, and arches do inside. Outside possibilities run the gamut: fireplaces, fire pits, birdbaths, fountains, pergolas, and gazebos. How large and how many to include depend on the size of the yard, house, and budget, says Batchelor. But, "better too few than too many, which may distract the eye," she says.

Extras for owners who want their yard to be an extension of the interior.

## 10. Natural ponds



Ponds today are constructed to look more natural than in the past, with freeform shapes, carefully arranged indigenous rock-rimmed borders, unstructured water-loving plants, koi fish, and adjacent stream beds. Many ponds nowadays are also equipped with an autofill feature so home owners don't have to fill a pond with a hose, possibly stressing fish.

Appeals to those who like the sight and sound of water and Mother Nature's handiwork.

### **Curb Appeal for Condos**

For those selling a condominium unit or town home, designers suggest the same features they recommend for single-family homes. Condo and town home sellers should ensure their unit has:

- Good lighting
- Seasonal flowers, shrubs, bushes, and trees
- Attractive ground cover
- An interesting, safe walkway
- An architectural element such as a birdbath, bench, or flagpole and flag
- An address that's easily visible
- Colorful shutters and front door

All those elements say loud and clear to buyers, "Welcome-you're home!"

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