



Local News

 Web Search by YAHOO!

HOME NEWS BUSINESS SPORTS OPINION ENTERTAINMENT MULTIMEDIA

obituaries business directory real estate jobs coupons deals **classifieds**

Connolly: Design your own personal park

Published 07/11/2013 12:00 AM Updated 07/08/2013 01:31 PM

COMMENTS (0)

SHARE

PRINT

The Jungle - that's what one of my clients called a section of their yard for 20 years.

It was an overgrown area they used as a leaf dump and it might have stayed that way if it weren't for the recent superstorms, which laid several trees flat and cracked others. No longer willing to live with the condition of this quarter-acre, they cleared the land and embarked on a landscape project they call The Park.

The family visits that part of the yard routinely now, a place they used to avoid. They've placed benches in the shade beside their new dogwoods, hawthorns, tupelos, maples and river birches. They installed no lawn at all, choosing a combination of rocks, groundcovers and mulch instead.

The place is busy with bees, butterflies and dragonflies. Birds, instead of pecking the berries of invasive bittersweet, now have native serviceberries and winterberries to choose from. When the birds drop these digested seeds miles away, they're spreading the seeds of vegetation that offer food and habitat to a wide variety of native critters.

Truly, this outdoor space has earned its name, The Park. Is there a park in your yard? All it takes, in my opinion, is a place to walk, a place to sit, something for the senses, and dedication to a purpose - you'll be on your way. Let's review four elements that make a park:

- A place to walk: Even if it is only 10 steps away, a park is a place you view or visit intentionally. It may be 10 steps from your door or it may be acres away, but you go there because you want to be there.
- A place to sit: Once a person arrives at a park, the benefits are derived by pausing at least a bit. The availability of seating - whether we actually use it or not - creates the invitation to stop, rest and look, a key part of the park experience.

- Something for the senses: A park speaks to our senses. Sights, sounds, scents, and textures are often featured in parks - why not in your own yard? Wind chimes, fountains, sculptures, a fireplace, brick oven, interesting rocks, artwork, birdhouse, bird bath, bee skep, lighting, trellis, arbor, pergola, or gazebo - at least one of these is available to almost anyone. And that list doesn't include the interesting plants and inviting pathways we can choose for these special spaces. The choices are more limited by our creativity than our wallets. (For some ideas, see "Handmade Garden Projects" by Lorene Edwards Forkner, Timber Press, 2011.)

- A purpose or goal: Have you ever seen a public park that had neither name nor purpose? Not likely. Public parks commemorate, preserve, set aside and beautify. Do you have a personal goal or value you'd like to express through your own personal park? In San Francisco last fall, I saw a parklet built on a family's dedicated parking space on a city street. (See my website, www.SpeakingofLandscapes.com/articles, for pictures and links.) They had abandoned the use of cars and their parklet, which features a topiary dinosaur, is a tribute to lower carbon emissions.

Is there a parklet in your future? Consider some of the following:

Is there an opportunity for found space - a place reclaimed from weeds, refuse, old pavement or other things that make it currently unavailable? By freeing that space, you'll not only nurture yourself but nature, too.

Is there a space that feels private or serene, a place where you can go for uninterrupted conversation? Walk around until a particular spot whispers in your ear, "Stay a while." Perhaps it is surrounded on two sides by a hedge, or protected from cars or pedestrians by a barn or garage. Perhaps it is invisible from the house - or perhaps it's a spot that draws your eye when you look out the living room window.

Is there a space you can use to inspire others or make a personal statement, like the family that gave up its parking space for a parklet?

The landscape is most outrageous right now - peak leaf, peak flowers, peak fruits, peak weeds. It's a great moment to explore your yard and garden for a space even more special than the rest.

Landscape hint for July: Mow grass 3 inches or higher during the next four to six weeks and reduce the number of times you mow. It will counteract the effects of heat and dryness, reduce carbon emissions, and may reduce the incidence of turf disease.

KATHY CONNOLLY IS A LANDSCAPE DESIGNER, GARDEN WRITER, AND FREQUENT SPEAKER. FIND HER ON FACEBOOK; VISIT HER WEBSITE, WWW.SPEAKINGOFLANDSCAPES.COM; OR EMAIL KATHY@SPEAKINGOFLANDSCAPES.COM.