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Site Design Survey

On a blank sheet or a tracing paper overlaying a Google Earth image sketch the **existing** features of the property: buildings, sidewalks, streets, alleys fences, trees, shrubs, garden areas, paths, power lines. (Research will determine what is underground and any setbacks influencing the plan.)

Indicate any structures or plants you plan to remove by outlining those in red.

Estimate the slope of the land, if any, and draw the contour lines.

Note which direction is south and any trees or structures in the area that cast shadows on your property. In the winter these shadows will be cast from a narrow arc to the south, while the sweep of the summer sun is higher and much further north at our latitude.

How windy is your site? What is the direction and force of the prevailing winds?

What information, if any, do you have about your soil?

Have you or your neighbors observed puddles on your property? Indicate where stormwater flows off a roof or any impervious surface and how it crosses the land.

Are there views you wish to preserve or highlight?

Where do you wish to screen views or create privacy?

How does your home connect to the landscape? If you imagine a deck or patio in your yard, what is the size and shape? How do you wish to access this space from the house, yard or garden?

Do you want to include a children’s play area or structures?

If you have animals, or plan to, what spaces, fences or structures will they need?

Will you grow vegetables, fruit or nut trees?

Do you have plants you wish to preserve or highlight? Any plans for other gardens?

Follow this exercise to discover what garden spaces you value the most:

Find a quiet time and space where you will not be interrupted and sit comfortably with a blank paper and pencil in front of you. With your eyes closed, take time to relax and breathe deeply without force. As your mind becomes quieter, invite yourself to imagine or remember the place in nature where you feel most at home.

Allow this visualization to be your full experience of this moment. How does your body feel in this place? What sensations are you experiencing? What do you smell, hear and see? When you are complete, open your eyes and record your experience.

You may repeat this exercise as needed to get the information you need to plan the garden of your dreams.

Most of us have had experiences in nature that have affected us deeply. In garden design we have an opportunity to create a sanctuary with elements of that environment to rekindle those experiences. Take the time to gain this knowledge through inner exploration or simply through direct experience of wild places, noticing where you are feeling peaceful, excited or fulfilled. Some aspects of design tend to be universal; as humans we often react in predictable ways to perception of balance, harmony and contrast through the elements of shape, form, color and pattern. Yet our likes and dislikes are as highly personal in garden design as any other art form. We know what we like when we see it (or experience it). Discovering what we value is the first step in designing a space to fully meet our needs.

Now you are ready to consider options for your landscape design. If you have a connection to an environment listed below, rate it with from one to three stars, with three stars indicating the strongest positive feeling. Do not mark choices you feel neutral about, but do make notes on what you do not like and want to avoid. Don’t be concerned with how to create that landscape in your space, implementing elements of design comes later.

How do these environments affect you?

Rocky mountainside with precious plants tucked in niches of gravel.

Cool and shady conifer forest with mossy mounds sprouting mushrooms.

Deciduous woodland carpeted with spring bulbs. The summer shade of a deep green crown. Bare branches silhouetted against the winter sky.

A thicket of berried shrubs sheltering songbirds.

Golden and flaming fall color swirling in the autumn wind.

Water trickling and gurgling through a creek bed.

A still lake reflecting the sky.

Midsummer meadow alive with buzzing insects and gleaming flowers.

The restless sea throwing waves against the shore.