

POOLSIDE PLANTINGS WITH PANACHE

TAKE THE MYSTERY OUT OF A SPECTACULAR SOFTSCAPE



Plantings provide the essential contrast needed to showcase a great swimming pool and hardscape.

Photos by Melanie Rekola

A beautiful landscape has many important elements; most based on contrast and balance. Plantings provide the essential contrast needed to showcase a great swimming pool and hardscape. It is these final touches—such as softscape, decorative stone and even furniture—that make a landscape truly spectacular.

It takes a lot of planning to create a beautiful garden. Foliage colour, texture, height and form are all things to consider before the thought of 'flowers' even enters the mind. Are there views to showcase or views to screen? What sun exposure exists? What style does the client prefer? These questions need to be answered long before the first seeds are planted.

STEP ONE: TREES

All softscape planning should start with tree selection, including both coniferous (evergreens) and deciduous varieties. Trees add the 'bones' to a landscape design, providing the necessary permanency around which the entire backyard is built.

Choosing coniferous plants is particularly important, since they provide year-round interest. Due to their conical form and minimal drop (needles fall off a little at a time during the year) compared to deciduous trees, many conifers are very appropriate for gardens around pools.

With careful planning and tree selection, a landscaper can create a backyard that offers substantial privacy and shelter for relaxing and entertaining. Depending on the desired setting and size of the backyard, there are a variety of



The eastern redbud, native to southern Ontario, produces a light to dark magenta-pink flower in the spring with heart-shaped leaves appearing afterwards.

specimens to choose from. The following are a few examples.
(Note: the maximum size of these trees will not likely be reached for 50 years or more.)

Thuja occidentalis 'emerald' (emerald cedar)

Native to southeastern Canada, emerald cedar is a popular and versatile conifer. It is typically planted in groups of three, five or more. Capable of growing 10 to 20 m (33 to 66 ft) tall, these narrow evergreen trees can provide privacy, soft year-round textural interest and are well suited to small spaces.

Chamaecyparis nootkatensis (weeping nootka)

Unique form and characteristics make the weeping nootka a wonderful specimen plant. Originally discovered on Nuchatlaht First Nations land on Vancouver Island, B.C., this evergreen tree can grow up to 40 m (131 ft) tall. Its open branching habit provides structural interest, without casting a lot of shade.

Picea omorika (Serbian spruce)

With its narrow form and pendulous branching, the Serbian spruce is yet another good option for landscaping around the pool. Native to central and southeastern Europe, this medium-sized evergreen tree can grow anywhere from 20 to 35 m (66 to 115 ft) high. It also grows much shorter and narrower than its hairy, untamed cousin, the blue spruce.

Amelanchier canadensis (serviceberry)

Native to southern Ontario and east to Nova Scotia, the serviceberry adds colour and texture to any backyard space. The serviceberry is a deciduous shrub or small tree capable of growing 0.5 to 8 m (1.6 to 26 ft) tall. It boasts prolific white blooms in spring, in the fall, it grows berries that begin red and turn blue, complemented with crimson foliage.

Cercis canadensis (Eastern redbud)

The Eastern redbud is another large shrub or small tree native to southern Ontario that offers a gorgeous spring flower show with heart-shaped leaves appearing afterwards. The Eastern redbud typically grows 6 to 9 m (20 to 30 ft) tall, with branches spreading approximately 8 to 10 m (26 to 33 ft), and is often used as a specimen plant.

Cotinus coggygria (smoke bush)

More like a shrubby tree, the 'Golden Spirit' smoke bush can provide a great contrast to dark-coloured evergreens with its elliptical, bright yellow leaves. Native to southern Europe, the smoke bush is multi-stemmed and can grow 5 to 7 m (16 to 23 ft) tall. It is also used as a specimen plant.

Taxus x media (spreading yews)

For a shaded area, or a spot that receives sun from the north or east, the small evergreen spreading yew has a soft dense habit. Available in dark greens (emerald spreader)

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This living wall uses a variety of sedums, e.g. Angelina and Blue Spruce, to create privacy where backyard space is limited.



Karl Forester feather reed grass is extremely hardy, with an upright habit that makes it appropriate in any space.

and chartreuse (sunburst), yews are often used within a landscape to divide non-complementary plant materials, as their foliage blends easily with most other plants.

Juniperus horizontalis (spreading juniper)
Similar to the spreading yew, spreading juniper foliage blends well with other plantings and thrives in sunny, hot and dry conditions. Reaching no higher than 100 to 300 mm (4 to 12 in.) and capable of spreading several metres wide, it is a low-growing shrub native to most of Canada. Often used as ground cover, this evergreen plant is perfect for creating a cottage-country feel, particularly when used with natural stone.

STEP TWO: DECIDUOUS SHRUBS AND ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

The next step to creating a great softscape is selecting an assortment of deciduous shrubs and ornamental grasses.

Deciduous shrubs are available in a variety of colours and textures, with many having the added benefit of beautiful flowers. Adding shrubs *en masse*, and repeating the same groupings within the space, will add continuity and keep it from looking messy. This also holds true for ornamental grasses, which add a unique sense of movement and texture to the landscape. Seeding plume heads also add interest during autumn months.

If privacy is priority, but space is limited, landscapers may opt to create a living wall.

These can be a nicer option than privacy lattice as they are completely covered with plant life, either as part of a building or its own free-standing structure. Living walls can be created using a variety of plant material and are typically less than 0.3 m (1 ft) deep.

There are many deciduous shrubs and ornamental grasses available to landscapers, including the following examples.

Hydrangea paniculata (hydrangea)

The hydrangea family, which is native to North America, South America and southern and eastern Asia, comprises approximately 75 species. This particular late-summer shrub, which grows from 1 to 1.5 m (3 to 5 ft), often has a large and long bloom cycle spanning six weeks, making them a good choice for any garden. Popular varieties include: 'Quick Fire,' which blooms early; 'Pinky Winky,' which, when combined with Quick Fire, can provide blooms for 10 weeks; and 'Sungold,' which offers beautiful gold foliage.

R. typhina 'Bailtiger' (tiger-eyes sumac)

Primarily found in southeastern Canada, the sumac family comprises roughly 250 species. Most varieties have a tendency to 'sucker' uncontrollably—that is, grow from the rootstock, rather than the desired part of the plant. The best sumac option is to use the tiger-eyes species, which is a much tamer native highbred with texture similar to Japanese maple. Tiger-eyes grow anywhere from 3 to 10 m

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(10 to 33 ft) tall with golden yellow foliage. They are also winter hardy to zone three, which is found in parts of northern Canada.

Syringa pubescens ssp. meyeri (dwarf lilac)

While the look and smell of spring-blooming lilac have broad appeal, many lilac varieties have a tendency to grow too large, ultimately looking unattractive in their mature state. A great alternative is the dwarf lilac, specifically the dwarf Korean lilac. This dense multi-stemmed deciduous shrub can grow to heights of 1.2 m (4 ft) and has a spread of roughly 1.5 m (5 ft). It has a mounded habit and tidy blue/green foliage with scented purple flowers.

Weigela (weigela)

Weigela, a family of deciduous shrubs, is another prolific bloomer. A popular choice among the 12 weigela species is the 'Wine & Roses' (*Weigela florida* 'Alexandra') variety, which offers purple foliage and fuchsia blooms appearing in early-to-mid summer. Native to eastern Asia, weigela are often used as ornamental shrubs, growing anywhere from 1 to 5 m (3 to 16 ft) tall and 3 to 3.6 m (9 to 12 ft) wide. Similar to the dwarf

Lilac, they have a rounded form with branches that typically arch towards the ground.

Calamagrostis x acutiflora

(Karl Forester feather reed grass)

Karl Forester feather reed grass is popular with landscapers due to its ability to withstand harsh conditions, such as dry and windy sites. Its tidy upright habit is the perfect contrast to low-lying shrubs and perennials and is appropriate in any space.

Miscanthus sinensis (miscanthus grass)

From the finely textured 'Maidenhair' (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder'), a horizontally striped zebra grass, to the large and strappy giant 'Maidenhair' (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Goliath'), miscanthus grass, which is native to eastern Asia, adds textural interest to any backyard. Similar to shrubs, miscanthus grass should be mass planted, preferably in groups of five or seven.

STEP THREE: PERENNIALS

Perennial plants are used as the final element added to any softscape plan. Their foliage can

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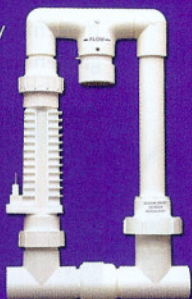
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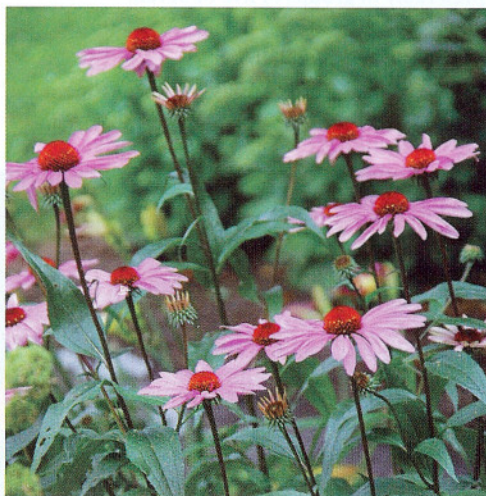
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THE STARTING POINT OF ALL SOFTSCAPE PLANNING **SHOULD BE SELECTION OF EVERGREENS AND ANY SUBSTANTIAL DECIDUOUS TREES.**



Daylilies can be planted in a wide range of hardiness, making them a popular choice among landscapers.



The purple coneflower is a drought-tolerant perennial plant that can grow up to 1 m (3 ft) tall.

add colours or textures that may have been missed in the earlier stages of design, while their impressive blooms add drama. The following are a few long blooming options.

Hemerocallis (daylily)

Daylilies, originally native to Europe and Asia, are extremely versatile and can be planted in hardiness zones from one through 11. They have strappy foliage, much like the grasses, so they should not be planted directly beside one another. Daylilies are popular because of their variety of large bloom colour. The 'D'oro' series, for example, has an extended and repeated bloom—the ruby variety produces rich red

flowers while the purple D'oro provides purplish-red blooms.

Sedum (sedums)

Sedums can be found throughout the Northern Hemisphere and have a succulent foliage that comes in a large variety of colours, textures and sizes—from the 0.6-m (2-ft) 'Purple Emperor' to ground covers that drape over stone—giving landscapers a variety of options. Popular ground-cover sedums include 'Blue Spruce,' 'Angelique' and 'Bronze Carpet,' which produce a vibrant range of foliage colour and blooms.

Echinacea (purple coneflower)

Unique to eastern and central North America, the purple coneflower is a drought-tolerant perennial plant that can grow up to 1 m (3 ft) tall. It comes in many varieties, with a bloom period (mid-to-late summer) of more than five weeks, making it a great addition to any landscape.

KNOW YOUR CLIMATE

No matter the style of softscape being performed, it is important to pick plant material that is hardy to the specific area's climate. Landscapers must also make sure proper survival conditions are provided. A hearty layer of quality soil and a thick layer of mulch will help ensure plant material will survive and thrive. When mulched properly, a garden will need very little additional water. For fertilization, organic, slow-release bone meal is preferred.

Consider adding native plant material, which are genetically adapted to the area and are meant to survive. Native plants support the local ecosystem, which often makes clients feel great about their landscape choices. In general, gardens provide a sense of well being and lessen the environmental footprint.

Why not capitalize on the current green movement by offering a spectacular organic garden to complement every pool project? ●



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