

Ornaments and the Four Season Garden

Provided by John Edwards Country Gardens Antiques for viriniagardening.com

"Will you design us a garden that will look good all year round?" "My garden looks great part of the year but what do we do about winter, or the hot dry spells of mid to late summer?" These seem difficult challenges when gardeners consider their gardens in term of flowers alone. But, as landscapes designers know, it is the strong design or "bones" of the garden that make it work: flowers are an embellishment.

Many elements can reinforce this basic design-- fences, walls, paths, architecturals, shrubs, trees, water and garden ornaments.

Handsome, carefully chosen ornaments can be a delight in every season and ask little in return. There is no worry about Japanese beetles, no spraying for black spot, and no extra watering during hot dry summers.

And many gardeners may be surprised to find themselves

photographing their garden in winter as much as in summer- enchanted by the different aspects of their ornaments shrouded in winter frost or ice, or suddenly clothed with white top hats and arms full of snow: or when a winter's afternoon sun gives a grey stone urn a bronzed tint.

With the new resurgence of interest in garden ornaments the choice has expanded. There has always been the beautiful, but very expensive, antique ornament market, and for many years an abundance of inexpensive ornaments. Now there is a middle range: handsome, well crafted garden sculpture in lead, bronze, poly-resins, cement and cast stone. Of these, the English cast stone and some American cement

compositions offer the most exciting combinations of antique appearance, year round durability, artistic detailing, and expanding product line, while still at reasonable prices. By final appearance alone it is often possible to identify the molds and characteristic manufacturing of the maker. As these materials weather through all four seasons, they age wonderfully with the garden.



In fact the garden can virtually "re-cast" an ornament's appearance. Rain filtered through overhead plants and trees is absorbed as colored stains. Areas such as crevices darken, adding character, while other areas lighten and mellow. Lichen can be encouraged to bring the garden's textures and its melancholy yellows and greens to the ornament.

Surrounding shrubbery, plants, and vines can be trimmed or expanded in ways that re-define a statue's scale and expression.



At our shop location customers can wander through successive "gardens of ornaments", set in various natural settings. Although most are amazed at the variety and quality of the English and American ornaments, they are not always sure how to adapt pieces they like into their own landscape.

Whether their "garden" is formal, natural, minimal, or just woods- many customers visit repeatedly, and return home to re-visualize their spaces, before making purchases.

As most customers contemplate landscape changes without a designer, we often recommend first starting with a light-weight pair of urns or finials, easily moved around to make it simpler to experiment in re-structuring their spaces. After establishing these "bones" of the landscape, customers can then consider spots to highlight and determine the appropriate scale for their ornaments.



Although some customers would benefit from on-site consultation with a trained landscape designer in order to artistically integrate house, environment, and garden - not all are ready to recognize this fact. Fortunately the selection and placement of ornaments is far easier to correct than any of the other more permanent elements in a design.

Some customers successfully use a combination of ornaments to create small garden vignettes, fountains, or even follies. Some use a single ornament, such as a bench, set in a wide open space or along a woods path to attract the eye and invite contemplation: others may use a simple pair of finials-on-base to suggest an entrance, or to mark transitions between "garden rooms".

One of the most important considerations in using ornaments is scale. If someone wants a bold statement in a large landscape there are few substitutes for the beautifully detailed large-scale urn or statue. It can uniquely set the scale, serve as focal point, or draw one to approach along its path.



Landscapes with towering trees or mature boxwoods almost require this large scale, but it can enhance more modest yards as well. The garden heritage of earlier ages can be suggested without an estate budget. A line of two or three tall statues on plinths can be enough to suggest the pattern of a far longer line into the distance. The "estate" scale of some pieces can even work in smaller garden areas as a central focus, or as a contrast to add variety of scale.

But ornaments can also do far more. Considerations of an ornament's texture, coloration, scale, subject, and interaction with design allows for drama and expression within the garden. The structure or "bones" can set the stage, and different pieces or "characters" can be moved in and out to alter the spirit of the garden, or to interact with the seasonal changes.

Thus, carefully selected ornaments are unique in their flexibility for design and in the opportunity they provide for creating interest and expression in the garden- throughout the four seasons.