

# Terrace Garden Design

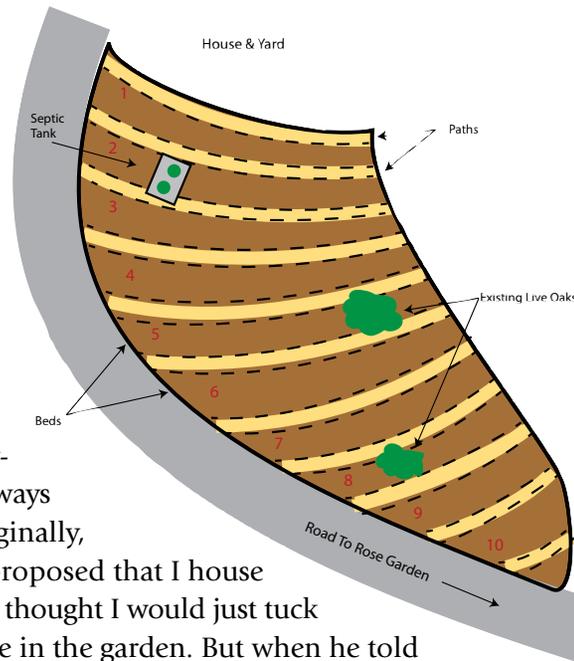
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As family and friends will surely say, I have a problem with roses. My garden already holds about 475 different roses, and I am always looking for more. Originally, when Gregg Lowery proposed that I house the Shrub collection, I thought I would just tuck them in here and there in the garden. But when he told me how many roses there were in the group, I realized that would not be possible and that I would have to create a new section for them.

For some reason, I am completely delusional about any garden project. I never seem to realize the scope of the things I envision—how much work it will entail or how long it will take to complete. It is only once I have seriously embarked on the project that I can get practical and think through all the steps it will require to complete.

The first thing I usually think about is design. My garden originated with beds in concentric circles and as I outgrew that, I used curving paths on slopes where circular paths were impossible. I have used the arc motif as a design element throughout the garden, including a large domed gazebo in the center and arching rebar supports for climbers in other places.

The area that I decided to develop is a fairly steep slope between our house and the rose garden, facing southwest. I had to consider not



only the design of the area, but also the more practical problems of fire danger, irrigation water sourcing, danger of erosion, suitability of the soil, and so forth. In the end, I decided to go with a very simple design of beds alternating with paths extending across the slope. Part of the reason for this was to prevent erosion—the beds are set crosswise to the slope, so low retaining walls would be the most stable design. The gentle arcs of the paths would echo the more complex circular or sinuous paths in other parts of the garden without being visually confusing.

Until now, that area had been a grassy hill, which we weed-whacked every year to create a good fire barrier. Although I had carefully considered fire danger in my initial design, last year's fires graphically demonstrated what did and



*Terrace Garden design, showing existing trees and septic tank (which we will disguise with plants and mulch) (left); Hill (viewed from the top) showing stakes to mark paths and beds. Below two small live oaks sits the rose garden (top); Grading from the top to the bottom of slope (center); Close look at beds #2 & 3. Caps of the septic tank show in upper left. Grading contractor sprayed the 12' measurement on edge of bed (above). (photos by S. Feichtmeir)*



did not work in fire prevention. The first night of the fires, we watched how the houses around us that did have a fire barrier were left unscathed, while those with no barrier burned. One of the main things I learned is that shredded redwood bark (AKA gorilla hair) will hold moisture like a wet wool blanket and act as a great fire barrier. It does burn fast when not wet, but I decided to add emergency sprinklers to my irrigation system. When there is danger of fire, I can just open a few valves, go to my irrigation controllers, fire up my preprogrammed emergency system and water the whole area down in a short time.

Another plan that changed was a planned large, wooden, arbor-covered staircase down the middle of the beds,

*The same beds directly up the hill toward house. In the current plan, the roses will be planted from the bottom beds first, so these beds will be planted last (above); One of the retaining walls and some of irrigation system. Pipes sticking up will connect to various irrigation systems around property with capacity for more valves. Most of pipe is already buried. Uprights are painted various colors to show which valve they will connect to (center); Abel, my assistant, back-filling dirt behind retaining walls to complete bed-building. (photos by S. Feichtmeir)*

extending from just below the house to the rose garden. However, after last year's fires, that idea went out the window. If there were to be a fire, that arbor would act as a fire path directed straight at the house.

Having decided on the band-across-the-hill shaped beds, I began to calculate how many I could fit in the space. Since many of the Shrub roses are quite large, I decided on 12' wide beds with 5' wide paths between each bed. If I ever acquire an ATV, we could use it on those paths. I ended up with 10 successively shorter beds descending the hill.

Last summer, the grading contractor cut the beds, and last fall we built the retaining walls and installed the main pipes for irrigation. My carpenter friend and I came up with the idea of retaining walls made of pressure-treated lumber stacked in varying heights and contoured to fit the curve of the bed going across the hill. (This was harder to do than I thought.) This worked very well and looks much tidier than railroad ties would have done.

For water, we have capacity on two different irrigation controllers, but not sufficient capacity for the whole hill on either one. I decided to water the lower beds from the controller used for the east side of the garden. The water pressure is very good from this controller, easily sufficient to push the water halfway up the hill for the five lowest beds. The upper beds will be watered from the top coming off a different controller which already has two extra valves.

We have included a separate pipe for a fruit tree irrigation system. I have some fruit trees in an "orchard" area, but they are not doing well due to the heavy soil and poor drainage. Planting fruit trees along the tops of the beds will give them much better drainage and soil. We will keep them pruned small for manageability and fire safety. However, they have very different water requirements from roses; hence the separate pipe. ■