



Urban Harvest

State Bill Opens up Front Yards to Diversified Designs

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A curving sidewalk edged with fragrant blooms create reasons to slow down rather than race to the front door.

Realtors talk about curb appeal -- that first glimpse that captures the eyes and emotions of a potential buyer, beckoning the person with a welcoming sensation. Would your front yard pass the test? What would entice someone to linger at your walkway or be interested in knowing the person beyond the front door? Front yards used to be places where neighbors regularly met to chat or to exchange garden tips, recipes or the gossip of the day, and where residents acquired that sense of place.



Include edibles in the front will give you an opportunity to share the garden's bounty and make instant friendships. Shown is cabbage growing next to perennials.

More often than not in our current neighborhoods, a front yard acts as a barrier, a moat if you will, to keep us safe behind our castle walls. Historically, deed restrictions and landscape ordinances evolved to produce uniformity, with a manicured appearance taking precedence. By tradition, landscapes have become so regimented there appears to be little room for inspiration much less a carved-out area to welcome neighbors.

Fortunately, with the 83rd Texas Legislature's passage of Texas Senate Bill 198, homeowner associations can no longer prohibit their residents from installing water-conserving

landscapes leaving the door wide open for a more diverse plant palette to include native plants and grasses.

Homeowners now have the option to extend planting areas to the curb. Before you conjure up visions of a weedy, vacant lot, remember, it still is important to follow basic design principles and maintenance practices.

Pathways meandering through the space can add interest and make upkeep easier.

Coordinating color, texture and height make the space feel harmonious. Perennials, trees and shrubs give structure to gardens, while annuals provide seasonal color. Plan for winter interest with shrubs such as Possum haw holly (*Ilex decidua*), whose branches will be lined with crimson berries. Including some edibles gives you an opportunity to share your bounty and make instant friendships when you offer some basil tucked into that basket of luscious, juicy-red tomatoes.

Create reasons to slow down rather than race to the front door. A curving sidewalk edged with fragrant blooms, a collection of herbs by the door, or a small island of mixed perennials will capture your attention as well as your visitors'. Add more interest to that line of foundation plants, often referred to as a mustache planting for its unimaginative row of shrubs, by bringing the front edge of the bed out a foot or more. This can gradually expand with a variety of attractive native shrubs and clumping grasses, such as Gulf Muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) or Little Bluestem



For some of the best winter color, plant possum haw hollies for literally thousands of berries. They are easy to grow and have very few pests.

(Schizachyrium scoparium), leaving less lawn to mow and more places for water to be absorbed.

Remember to repeat garden elements and plants to bring continuity to the design and keep



A birdbath, along with the berry producing American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), will attract winged neighbors to a front yard garden.

the area from looking too hodge-podge. A birdbath along with shrubs that develop fruit or berries, such as **American Beautyberry** (*Callicarpa americana*), will attract winged neighbors and add a flutter of activity. If your taste leads to artwork, incorporate garden sculpture - formal or whimsical.

If you are fortunate enough to have a porch, this is an easy way to bring interest to the forefront of your property. Porches were built for many reasons - to cool hot breezes entering the home before the advent of air conditioning, as a place to sip iced tea or lemonade at the end of the day, or to enjoy the porch swing. As building styles changed with the expansion of the suburbs, porches fell out of fashion, forcing us to migrate from our front yard to the backyard. We began cultivating isolation rather than friendships and flowers.

A patio added to the front yard can be a nice substitute for a porch. Shape a welcoming space and skirt it with colorful perennials and small shrubs or create an outdoor room as an extension of your indoor space simply by moving the garden furniture to the front yard. Drape tiny white lights through a tree or across the shrubs for an instant party atmosphere. Invite neighbors to dine at a long, cloth-covered table adorned with a bouquet of freshly picked blooms from your cutting garden. Your front yard will be the toast of the neighborhood, and the banquet will fill your soul as well as your stomach.



Pineapple guava has beautiful, interesting flowers that attract insects and birds

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