

Naturalistic Planting Design

'It's about setting aside our desire for control to instead work in partnership with nature.'
 'The naturalistic ethos is about creating a multi-purpose garden with the amplitude to feed the soul and nurture local biodiversity. It seeks to minimize typical garden inputs like pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, while recycling its outputs from rainwater to garden waste, all in the name of self-sustainability.'
 'Planting styles to help re-invigorate public landscapes. .relatively low-maintenance costs, be as sustainable as possible, taxonomically diverse, demonstrate marked seasonal changes, and support as much wildlife as possible.'

What are the growing conditions needed?

A naturalistic style can be used in any setting- large or small scale- from a small garden to the NYC highline. It can be adapted to almost any ecosystem by grouping plants of a common habitat together- woodland prairie, wetland, or steppe. The more you know about the conditions of the environment- soil, PH, light, moisture, hardiness- the more successful your design will be. The aim is to select proven, long-lived, robust plants capable of performing strongly in various conditions.

Naturalistic planting design may include plants such as ...



Stipa Barbata –
Bearded Feather
Grass



Enchinacea pallida
– Pale Purple
Coneflower



Eryngium alpinum –
Alpine Sea Holly



Lythrum Salicaria –
Purple Loosestrife



Eremurus
– Foxtail Lilies



Stipa tenuissima –
Mexican
Feathergrass



Matteuccia struthiopteris
– Ostrich Fern



Sporobolus heterolepis
– Prairie dropseed



Muhlenbergia capillaris
– Muhly grass



Aquilegia canadensis
– Red columbine

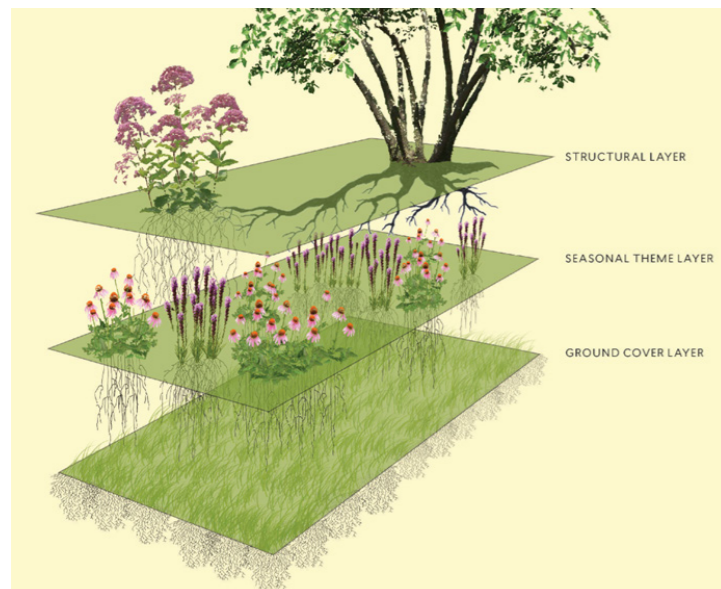
The role of plants in a naturalistic planting design:

The approach is about embracing change in the garden and the interplay of textures and foliage from birth to bloom and from decay to death, seeing plants as more than just the beauty of their flowers- NEW PERENNIAL MOVEMENT

What are the design principles?

We must think of the herbaceous kingdom as a series of spires, globes, daisies, buttons, spikes, plumes, and umbels, as well as the textural effects that various plants can create.

To create a naturalistic design, layers must be taken into consideration:



Picture taken from Planting in a Post-Wild World

- structural layer: trees, shrubs, taller perennials, and grasses
- companion plant layer: mid-size theme plants

- groundcover layer: works like a living mulch to suppress weeds, retain moisture, and thereby eliminate the need to apply store-bought mulch to bare soil

- vertical layer: vines and climbers to run up fences, shrubs, and trees

- filler layer: short-lived plants and bulbs scattered throughout to add spontaneity and seasonal interest so instead of planting in monocultural blocks, everything is intermingled and single or small groups- groups flow into one another.

Notable designers include ...



Mien Ruys, a dutch landscape architect and garden designer.

She worked at Moerheim in Dedemsvaart, the world famous perennial nursery gardens of her parents, as the head of design department.



Piet Oudolf - leader of the new perennial movement of planting design.

His designs and plant compositions using bold drifts of herbaceous perennials and grasses.

Hummelo Garden



Dan Pearson, a British designer with a light-handed approach to design, bold and painterly naturalistic plantings and deep-rooted horticultural knowledge.



Charlotte Rowe's work involves a naturalistic and generous planting design, combined with a strong sense of structure, the hallmarks of a planting design.

Key Reference Books/Websites:

- Gardens of the High Line: Elevating the Nature of Modern Landscapes , Piet Oudolf and Rick Darke
- The Know Maintenance Perennial Garden, Roy Diblik
- Planting in a Post-Wild World, Claudia West and Thomas Rainer
- (Wild-ish at Heart: Naturalistic planting design - The New Perennialist, 2022)
- (dan pearson OBE | MSGD | Hon FRIBA | RDI - Dan Pearson Studio, 2022)
- (Thomas Rainer and Piet Oudolf on Naturalistic Gardens - FineGardening, 2022)
- Herbaceous Perennial Plants, 3rd Edition, Allan M. Armitage

