



Boundaries both separate and connect

When viewed from one direction (above), the colors of the picket fence, pergola, siding, and gravel unite the scene. From another direction (below), the repeated fencing defines the spaces.



Creating Continuity

Use boundaries and repetition to make your garden flow from one area to the next

by Jerry Fritz

A few years ago I received a call from a potential client; her request was clear: "I need help!" After meeting her at the site, it became evident to me that the fairly new driveway was not blending in with the existing landscape—a common dilemma I see as a designer. No matter if it is big or small, flat or sloped, or shady or sunny, each garden has transitional spaces—areas we use to get from one part of a property to another, such as between the driveway and the front door. Because most gardeners are preoccupied with their actual gardening spaces, the voids in the middle are often given little attention.

Transitional spaces can sometimes be difficult to design because, typically, they are invisible planes between garden and functional areas. When they are poorly designed, the areas are not clearly defined or don't relate to one another. I have found that successfully linking areas to each other and the

surrounding landscape can be easily done with the use of boundaries and repeated elements.

DISTINCT BOUNDARIES DELINEATE SPACES

Establishing a boundary between two areas is an easy way to make a smooth transition from one space to the next. A boundary indicates to the visitor that there are two distinct areas or rooms on either side. A boundary also cues visitors as to which direction they should move and provides a backbone for an otherwise-awkward transitional space. When it comes to materials for a boundary, the sky is the limit. Traditional hedges and picket fencing are popular choices, but the creative use of plants or stone walls can be equally effective, providing degrees of anticipation by partially obstructing the view of a neighboring area.

A boundary should relate well to the rest of your property. Choose a mate-



**Consistent color
creates commonality**

When used repeatedly, flowering plants like purple salvia and catmint help to make different beds feel connected on either side of a boundary.



rial that doesn't stick out like a sore thumb; suits the color or style of your garden, home, outbuildings, paths, or driveway; and makes everything cohesive. Although a boundary can vary in size, it should be in scale with its surroundings. For example, if you're dealing with an expansive space, a sizable fence or a hedge of blue holly (*Ilex × meserveae* cvs., USDA Hardiness Zones 5–9) would be fitting. If your garden is set in tight quarters, however, a row of common lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* and cvs., Zones 5–8) might be more appropriate.

'Unique', Zones 4–8) with their large, fragrant flowers.

REPEAT SIMILAR ELEMENTS TO UNITE MULTIPLE ROOMS

Another transitional trick that works time and again is the repetition of similar elements such as boundary material, plant species, or colors throughout a series of garden rooms. The idea is to establish a visual commonality in each space, which, in turn, unites the entire garden. Being a plant fanatic, my preference is to use plants to link spaces. I find myself repeating similar

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One of my favorite boundary choices is a stone wall. It is multifunctional and can be used structurally where you need to hold back soil on a slope or used aesthetically to give a rustic appearance to an entry. A hedge is an excellent, cost-effective alternative to a stone wall and forms an attractive, natural boundary. It is also hard to beat when concealing an eyesore or providing privacy.

I like to use evergreens like boxwoods (*Buxus sempervirens* and cvs., Zones 6–8) for blocking views, and deciduous plants such as privets (*Ligustrum vulgare* and cvs., Zones 5–8) or upright ornamental grasses like 'Northwind' switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Northwind', Zones 5–9) for seasonal seclusion. Because most gardens are enjoyed in warm weather, try planting a flowering hedgerow using dwarf Korean lilacs (*Syringa meyeri* and cvs., Zones 4–7) or 'Unique' panicle hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata*

plants in groupings on either side of a path, driveway, or patio to help bridge the areas. One of my favorites is the deer-resistant Mellow Yellow™ spirea (*Spiraea thunbergii* 'Ogon', Zones 5–8) combined with 'Walker's Low' catmint (*Nepeta × faassenii* 'Walker's Low', Zones 4–8). This combination softens the edges of hardscape as the billowy forms of both plants cascade over the rigid edges of stone. Underfoot, the versatile mazus (*Mazus reptans*, Zones 5–8) and golden creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea', Zones 4–8) can be repeated in the cracks between paving stones to achieve similar results and provide a transition from hardscape to the garden.

I gravitate toward the striking combination of chartreuse and purple because the contrasting pair reads well from any distance. Swaths of 'Caradonna' salvia (*Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna', Zones 5–9) and lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*, Zones 4–7)—or any

Connecting to the LARGER LANDSCAPE

One of my college professors often said, “Work with nature, not against it.” When it comes to transitioning from cultivated areas to more-natural landscapes, these words couldn’t ring more true. While installing boundaries and repeating objects also works in natural settings, taking cues from nature is the best strategy when transitioning from cultivated to wild spaces.

► **STUDY THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE** to create a plant repertoire that will blend seamlessly with areas like meadows, woodlands, or wetlands. Begin by using your house as the starting point and gradually arrange the plants into a less-formal and less-symmetrical layout as you move outward. Likewise, allow plants to embrace their natural form rather than maintain tightly pruned or constantly deadheaded forms.

► **ESTABLISH A MASS PLANTING** or buffer zone between a cultivated and a naturalized area to make the transition because this is often how plants grow in nature. One approach, for example, is to plant a meadow. I recently used the native ‘Dallas Blues’ switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum* ‘Dallas Blues’, Zones 5–9) for an entire meadow to marry a client’s woodland backdrop to a newly constructed, screened-in porch (photo, below). I also trickled in some ‘Dallas Blues’ into the existing foundation plantings to help conceal the porch footings and to join together the foundation and the meadow. The freewheeling disposition of the grass heightened the natural look of the garden and created a smooth transition from the cultivated to the naturalized spaces.



other plants lathered in purple and chartreuse—repeated in garden areas or rooms moves the focus away from the individual spaces and toward viewing the garden as a whole. Of course, if you don’t care for purple and chartreuse, there are plenty of other colors you can choose to repeat.

While boundaries themselves help mark the progression from one location to the next, repeating them throughout a property further helps to unite all of the spaces. Whether you decide to go with modest picket fencing or grand stone walls as boundaries, remember to keep it simple. When choosing stones for walls, for example, I am careful to limit the range to just a few colors and sizes so that the wall doesn’t look chaotic. I make sure the colors tie into those of the house and other hardscape materials. I likewise link the fencing color back to those in the surrounding area and keep it consistent throughout the property.

Because natural stone has a sense of permanence and a strong year-round presence, I like to use it repeatedly as paving material or as an ornament. One way I do this is by installing granite slabs at landings and granite posts at a gate or as decorative markers around the garden. Setting granite vertically is a powerful and effective way to lead one through a garden and create cohesion. Repeating hardscape elements can be as easy as using the same gravel in your driveway and paths or using the same type of wood for gates, decks, and pergolas.

Perhaps the next time you take that familiar walk from your parking spot to the front door or from the front yard to the backyard, you’ll see an opportunity to employ boundaries and repeated elements to make a seamless connection between your spaces. ♡

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