



Creating a BEAUTIFUL DRIVEWAY

Turn functional
into fabulous

Story and photos by Hunter Stubbs

MY GRANDPARENTS' DRIVEWAY IN RURAL GEORGIA WAS A LONG, GRAVEL ROAD THAT WENT FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE A QUARTER OF A MILE THROUGH THE OLD DAIRY FARM.

In this case the driveway was all about function, but today it's much different. Now home sites are much smaller, and access for vehicles uses up much of the available garden space. Planning is critical when seeking to minimize driveway area and maximize your garden area.

New home sites offer the opportunity to do it right the first time, but even people buying existing homes are opting to modify the driveway

scenario. New or modified driveways can offer greater functionality and much improved curb appeal.

THE DRIVING SURFACE

If you are fortunate enough to be in the early stages of planning your home, I highly recommend retaining a landscape designer or landscape architect to talk through the various considerations. Initial grading of the lot, siting of the driveway, spatial considerations for maneuverability of vehicles and the various surface options should be carefully thought through. Each of these are critical to either the functional or visual effect of the driveway.



Proper grading of a driveway can mean the difference between installing a complex drainage system and having surface water simply shed off in the event of a storm. For example, I suggest installing an apron outside the garage that slopes away for at least 6 feet before letting grade rise in front of the garage. This can help ensure water doesn't get in the garage.

A larger consideration is determining the initial elevation of the home. A shift in the main floor elevation of even 1 foot can have long-term implications on the drainage of the driveway and foundation beds.

Flow and maneuverability issues can also be a long-term frustration. Many driveways I have

visited simply don't work. No one seemed to consider the fact that most families have at least one larger car. I always try to plan my driveways with a Chevrolet Suburban in mind. This may seem like overkill, but if you can turn that around, a Prius is no problem. Keep in mind that driveways should generally be 12-feet wide and each car should be allowed approximately 25-feet in length. In addition, different cars have different turn radiuses. These calculations should be used when laying out a properly functioning circular drive or turn bay.

Considerations of surface materials are principally an aesthetic consideration. Material costs vary tremendously. In most markets gravel is the

△ **Interesting, drought-tolerant structural plantings are emphasized in this design. Evergreens (arborvitae, *Chamaecyparis*, *Sedum*, *Sempervivum* and thrift) provide year-round structure, while spring bulbs, salvias, hollyhocks, saponaria and euphorbia infuse spring and summer color to the border planting.**

No matter what your taste in plantings, it is likely that your driveway warrants a second look and can easily move from utilitarian to inviting with the implementation of a few of these ideas.

least expensive, followed by asphalt, concrete and a variety of other decorative surfaces such as stamped concrete and pavers. If budget demands the economical solution of gravel or asphalt, you can give it a little nicer look by edging it with pavers or stone. There are also options such as using a decorative entry apron, or an apron off the garage. Parking areas are a great place to use a decorative surface. This can help indicate where guests are to park, and they are easy additions to existing driveways for a “wow” effect.

BEAUTIFY WITH LANDSCAPING

Once the driveway is complete it's time to wrap it with plants. In my yard the driveway edge offers a critical amount of space for continued experimentation and delightful flower displays. My driveway is blacktop and there is no shade to be found. For a client, I would likely

look to buffer the South side of the driveway with a tree for shade, but in my case I want the sun and the challenge.

I do not have irrigation along my driveway and do not plan to. I've been testing plants for durability, and I've found some winners.

The mailbox area is populated with the steel-blue foliage of blue spruce sedum (*Sedum pinifolium*) interspersed with hens and chicks (*Sempervivums*), all backed up with hollyhocks and a large specimen of the frosty-foliaged *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Snow'.

On the opposing corner I have blanketed the edge of the driveway with the delight of spring, *Phlox subulata*. Phlox comes in a variety of colors and almost seems to prefer poor conditions. With a height of 3 inches, it can spread to 6 feet and create a traffic-stopping pastel display. The rest of the year it is a fantastic evergreen



Walls and raised borders offer great opportunities for weeping and trailing plants. Weeping pines, thrift, candytuft and dianthus present great draping opportunities, while volunteer seedlings of violas, euphorbias and hollyhocks are likely to take advantage of the pavement cracks at the base of the wall.



ground cover. Farther down is a gold display from the foliage of golden oregano (*Origanum vulgare* 'Aureum'), backed up by the heat-tolerant *Salvia greggii* in hot pink. All salvias are super-tough heat performers, and the *greggii* types stay down to 2 feet and play over the asphalt with no issues.

Other great performers along the driveway include the low, sprawling 'Pink Drift' roses that will present a low alternative to the popular Knock Out roses. They give summer interest to their neighbor, the dwarf *Forsythia* 'Gold Tide', which has quickly risen to the top of my list of favorite dwarf shrubs. This forsythia still maintains the stellar spring display we all love, but the plant habit is a compact 4 feet with a slightly stoloniferous habit that forms a solid mass.

SMALLER EXAMPLES

In stark contrast to my busy driveway take the tiny driveway gardens of Charleston. These gardens are often shaded from a large old tree and may be more of a car parking space than a driveway. These parking spaces often intrude into the small courtyard of the residence, and the plantings are principally to screen out the cars and offer a doorway into the private garden and home.

One of my clients has just such a space, where a large oak tree overhangs a quaint parking pad of small, crushed river stone. The parking area is bordered by an 18-inch high boxwood hedge, with pyramid boxwoods on the end framing the arch doorway at the head of the parking bay.

On one side this hedge is backed by oakleaf hydrangeas, while the other side and the head of the bay are backed by more lush greenery of *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Schipkaensis West Coast'. This larger hedge lends privacy to the inner garden. At the front of the bay we have formed a living doorway through the hedge that mirrors a stone arch seen farther down the path. Other than the hydrangeas, the only other flowers in this scene are from a three-tiered hay-basket planter situated in one corner filled with double impatiens and ferns.

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△ **Serene and green plantings create an inviting parking bay for this small mountain cottage. The evergreen hedges give textural interest and a lush buffer of the cars from the interior garden.**