

The Dos and Don'ts of a Winning Garden

We know you love your garden, and it's fun to enter a garden contest, but have you ever wondered what it takes to create a winning garden? What exactly do the judges look for?

You can find the judging criteria in the Streetscape brochure and on the City's website: www.mississauga.ca/blooms but to give you a sense of what you should and shouldn't be doing, here are a few ideas to help you in your quest for that garden gold!

DO complete the entry form clearly and carefully. Please print. Read the rules and sign the form. Incomplete or late entries will be disqualified.

DON'T send in more information than we ask for, such as photos or descriptions of your garden. The judges will not see them.

DO be patient. Keep in mind that judging takes place over a 4 - 6 week period.

DON'T call to enquire if and when judging will take place. To keep the contest fair to everyone, we do not give out that information.

DO maintain your garden over summer. Keep in mind should your garden make it to the finals, it will be judged three times, on separate occasions.

DON'T be too concerned about weather damaging plants or affecting bloom times. Judges will allow for the current season's weather conditions.

DO keep buildings, structures and accessories in good repair.

DON'T leave clutter in your front yard. It spoils the overall appearance of your garden.

DO try to keep plantings and containers in proportion to your house. Walk across the street and view your garden from a distance. That will give you an idea of whether the scale is right.

DON'T think too small when planning garden beds. Make them larger than you think they should be. Small beds "disappear" visually when seen from a distance. Go bold!

DO keep in mind the provincial ban on herbicides and pesticides. Judges will accept some weeds in lawns so long as the lawn is generally healthy.

DON'T be afraid to get rid of the lawn if you wish. There's no rule that says you must have one.

DO prune trees and shrubs with the natural shape in mind. Prune neatly and cleanly, removing any ugly branch stubs.

DON'T prune everything into geometric shapes, unless you are creating topiary, or want one or two formally clipped shrubs as a feature.

DO use features and accessories that harmonize with the style of your garden. Japanese statuary in a cottage-style garden looks out of place.

DON'T overwhelm your garden with accessories. A few well-chosen, well-placed pieces will enhance your garden. Too many will detract.

DO use plants of different heights, colours and textures to create interest. If everything is the same, nothing stands out or leads the eye around the garden.

DON'T neglect weeding and deadheading.

DO use curved lines for flower beds. It creates flow and looks more natural.

DON'T plant in straight lines unless you are creating a stylized, formal garden.

DO place plants in appropriate locations – sun lovers in sun etc. Use plants to soften or hide ugly features, and to highlight attractive ones.

DON'T plant a large shrub in front of a window or where it will impede a walkway or entrance.

DO give trees and shrubs room to grow. Space them according to their mature size, not the size they are at time of planting.

DON'T overplant or choose trees and shrubs that are too big for your space. They will constantly need cutting back.

DO dare to be different. Foliage or “green” gardens, herb gardens, wildflower gardens and “collectors” gardens are all interesting.

DON'T feel you have to include flowers. Foliage alone can provide a variety of colours, shapes, sizes and textures.

DO work towards a balance of harmony and contrasts. Place several plants of the same variety in a group to maximize impact.

DON'T ever display plastic or other artificial flowers or plants.

And finally:

DO remember that there are exceptions to every rule. Sometimes, breaking the rules produces amazing results.

DON'T stifle your creativity to meet other peoples' expectations. Be unique – create the garden you love!

Good luck in the contest!

Streetscape Mississauga