



Karen Anderson

## There are lessons to be learned from some of my gardening mistakes

*As anyone who's ever visited her yard can attest, Club Columnist Karen Anderson has a way with plants. This month, however, she shares a few notable gardening blunders for your learning pleasure.*

Before you pull on your gardening boots and pick up your planting shovel this spring, take some advice from an expert. Not that I'm an expert on landscaping, mind you. What I am is an expert on bad landscaping. I am a local authority on landscaping mistakes from which your yard will never recover without many seasons of horticultural therapy at professional rates.

The people who owned my house before me made three of them. Then, after I moved in, I made several more – three of which I'm willing to admit to.

### Mistake #1: Water features

I love the look and sound of a burbling fountain, and I am not alone.

At our house, fountains have attracted birds, dogs, cats, and a clan of tidy raccoons who used the running water to wash off the three-day old mussels they'd dug out of a neighbor's garbage can.

### Mistake #2: Over-exposure

You want your back yard to look great to you, but what about how it looks to the neighbors? For some inexplicable reason, the previous owners of our house installed a hot tub on a raised deck in full view of every other house in the neighborhood. We clambered into it once or twice, but it made us feel like trained seals at the circus. Eventually, we decided it had to be removed – which brings me to mistake #3.

### Mistake #3: Poorly designed fences

What goes into the back yard may need to get out again. This includes enormous hot tubs. Our predecessors clearly weren't thinking of this when they installed an elaborate fencing system with narrow gates. As a result, we had to remove much of the fencing to bring in a backhoe when it was time to say goodbye to our hot tub. That process that turned

out to be easier than we'd feared only because the fence posts, installed without concrete, had conveniently rotted.

### Mistake #4: Thinking small

Chances are, if a new bush looks perfect for the space as soon as you plant it, you're doing it wrong. You'll feel silly in five years when it's reached maturity: 12 feet wide, 40 feet high, and blocking all of your windows.

### Mistake #5: Planting invasive bamboo

In the time that it took me to type this sentence, the bamboo in your backyard grew six inches and the runners beneath it invaded the sewer pipes of the family three houses down. What? You don't have bamboo in your backyard? Just wait a month or two. It's coming. Eradicating the bamboo at our house took three days – using the backhoe I mentioned earlier.

### Mistake #6: Defensive gardening

Three years ago I got tired of seeing my neighbor's garbage cans towering over my flower garden. So I planted a row of dwarf conifers that soon blocked the containers from my sight. Imagine my dismay last April while I discovered that the neighbors had moved the ugly cans six feet down the driveway and back into full view so they could store their fifth car – a vintage convertible – where the garbage had been. This time, I wasn't the only one to suffer; when my watering system kicked on in June, it drenched the convertible.

It'll be years before I recover from all my landscaping disasters, inherited and self-inflicted. But, lest you think my garden is a total failure, I want to share with you a tip from the professional landscaper who came in to consult on my bamboo. He looked at the concrete foundation of my neighbors' garage, which looms over my back garden, and said "Paint it eggplant. Goldenrod yellow. Maybe bright blue. Just paint it."

I rolled my eyes as I walked him to his truck and I chuckled for the next week as I told my friends about his hare-brained scheme. But you'll notice I don't have "Paint your garden wall goldenrod yellow" as Mistake #7 on the list. That's because I did it, and it looks fabulous.

