

NeighborKnowledge

Don Bishop Directing Traffic, Garden Style

MARLBOROUGH | MASSACHUSETTS

WINTER IS THE IDEAL TIME to plan for next year's garden. Older gardens may be in need of updating or improvement, and the stark outlines of the season present a great opportunity to analyze the design of the landscape — without too many other distracting garden tasks.

Don Bishop, the owner of Gardens Are . . . , takes the time to look at the bones of the garden and to focus on a major concern that is often overlooked: traffic patterns. He looks at the routes people take when they pull into the driveway, walk toward the house and walk through the garden. Rearranging the planting beds, paths and lawn areas can make the circulation much more pleasant. Even the habits of non-human residents of a landscape are examined for their effect on traffic flow.

"If I see a dog, I watch its habits — beelining through the roses!" Bishop said, citing a frequent problem.

Reshaping and repositioning certain planting areas can make a big difference in how well the garden works. Often, consolidating smaller beds into larger ones will make lawn mowing easier. Changing the curve of a walkway can improve the views for someone walking along it, while adding a striking plant or sculpture can draw the eye in another direction. In established gardens, rearrangements often require transplanting existing plants.

Picturing the landscape from above is essential. Photographs are helpful whenever possible.

"I usually set aside an area on the property as a nursery, to nourish plants that are being moved around," Bishop said. "Once the rearrangements have been completed, some or all can be replanted in new locations."

Picturing the landscape from above is essential. Actual photographs are helpful whenever — and wherever — possible.

"On one property, I made a garden that looked like a pinwheel going around the house," Bishop said. "The idea came from the traffic pattern of the two dogs going in and out of the house, circling from the front door to the back."

By taking the aerial approach, Bishop gave his clients a dramatic, graphically intriguing garden — the blades of the pinwheel were filled in with mass plantings of roses and perennials — while allowing their pets to continue their preferred routine.

Bishop's many pursuits often combine art and science. He met his wife in music school, and their six mostly home-schooled children have wide-ranging interests. He is active in many organizations, including the Environmental Landscaping Association, and he is a teacher and developer of the Northeast Organic Farming Association's Organic Land Care program.

Bishop's gardens often have several layers of meaning. One of his displays at the Central Massachusetts Flower Show in Worcester, a "quilted" patio garden, was named Best of Show.

"Some people get it, some people don't," he said, referring to his designs. "That's what art is about." — *Laura Eisener*



PAUL KENWORTHY

A Wide Berth for Nature

What happens when there is a tree in the way of a proposed path? "Ninety percent of the time, I keep an older tree and route the path around it," Bishop said. "I may hand-prune to get 10 to 15 percent more light into the garden, but never lift the skirt of the tree." Branches around the base of conifers are kept, and careful attention is paid to the overall shape.

