



MODULE 2 : Lesson 7b

Design Principle:

Proportion

How to get the right proportion in your design to create a stunning garden.

In the last lesson we learnt how important **SHAPE** is and why it is the key to designing your garden successfully.

You learnt the main design technique that enables you to successfully shape the layout of your garden. The '*inside out*' technique probably feels a little bit counter-intuitive to you at the moment but if you trust it and use the technique, you will be able to design your garden successfully.

But of course there's going to be a bit more to the process than just that one technique - life can't be that easy!

There is another very important principle to learn - 'Proportion'. Even if you have come up with a great shape for your design, if it's not in proportion with everything else in the garden, it won't look and feel right.

Before we go into more detail, let's do a quick experiment.

Look at fig.11. Which of the three has the lawn in the 'right' proportion to the size of the garden? Or to put it another way - which one looks like it has the right amount of lawn?

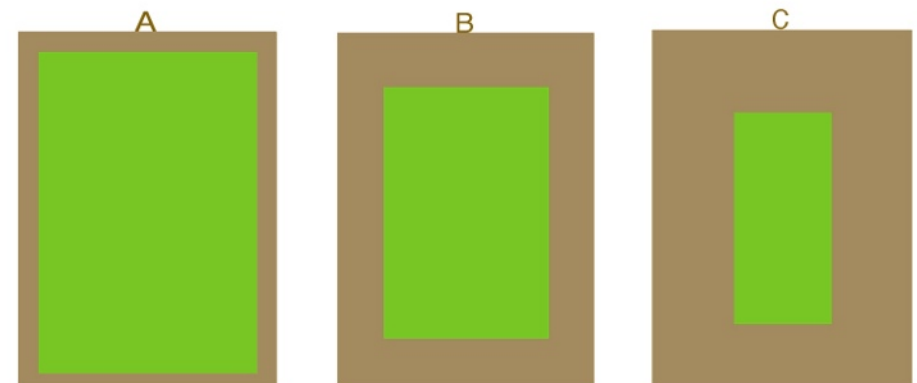


Fig. 11.

Which one did you pick? Did it take you a long time to decide which 'looks' right or did you instantly know?

Hopefully this is something you will have found fairly easy (though don't panic if you didn't).

The point of the exercise is two-fold, one to show you that this is something that you can instinctively do already and two, to get you to be consciously aware of the right proportion.

Guideline proportion

If you weren't entirely sure then use this as a rough guide: As a rule of thumb I tend to find that two-thirds space to one-third mass works well. If you remember back to the previous lesson, spaces are the areas you can walk on like lawns and patios and masses are the areas you can't walk on, like plants and upright structures.

So with that rule in mind I would use option B as a good starting point; the size may well get adjusted as the design progresses. There is room for the lawn to get slightly bigger or smaller and still work.

Not fixed in stone

The reason it can be a bit subjective is there isn't a fixed rule on precisely how much empty space / filled areas you should have.

If for example you have children and a dog, you might want to make the lawn marked B in fig.11 slightly larger (though not as large as A). So the use and desired end result does impact your decision making.

If you find yourself unsure you have the proportion right, leave the drawing for a few minutes and when you come back to it trust your instincts – does it look and feel right? If you are still unsure, leave it for longer and then take a fresh look.

Alternatively, if you are not comfortable just trusting your intuition, follow the guideline of one-third planting to two-thirds empty space. You can always adjust your design later if it doesn't look quite right.

If you didn't find it easy to spot B as the one that had the best proportion - take another look - now that you know, can you see it more easily?

Even if you breezed through the little experiment with figure 11, don't dismiss just how important getting the right proportion is.

SUCCESS TIP:

Proportion: Two-thirds empty space to one-third mass works well.

It may not come to you quite so easily when you are designing. It's SO easy to get caught up in everything else involved with the design process that you can easily overlook the basic fundamentals. And if you get those wrong, it all goes to pot!

Other examples of proportion

As well as the proportion of the overall size of your garden, each feature you add must also be in proportion to everything around it and in proportion to the people that use the garden.



For example, if you have a pergola, you need to make sure that it not only looks good in proportion with the garden but it also has to work with you. If you are six feet tall and the pergola is six and a half feet high, it's going to feel very uncomfortable to walk under,

especially when the plants start to hang down from the beams.

If you make the pergola seven and a half foot high you also need to make sure it's wide enough to take the height. For example a pergola or archway that is three foot wide and seven foot tall would look too tall and skinny. Whereas a width of four to five feet would look more in proportion to the height.

You also need to think about proportion with the size of your main patio. If you are unsure if it looks too big or too small - peg it out in the garden and set out your patio furniture. You'll soon see if it is in the right proportion to everything else in the garden.



To give you a some real life practice with proportion, open the worksheet that accompanied this lesson and have a go at trying it for yourself.

In the next lesson will we look at another very important design principle - movement - what is it in relation to designing your garden, how it works and how it can make your design dynamic and interesting.

If you have any questions regarding this lesson, please leave them in the comments box on the lesson download page.

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Teaser question - Look at the size of the lawn in the photo - **Is the lawn:**

- a) Slightly smaller than the normal 1/3 -2/3rds proportion
- b) Spot on
- c) Slightly larger than the normal 1/3 -2/3rds proportion

Answer is at the end of the worksheet that accompanies this lesson.