

BUNGALOW GARDEN DESIGN

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The resurgence of interest in the Chicago Bungalow has moved beyond the house itself and into the garden. What ideas shaped garden designs? How were Bungalows originally landscaped? How do I approach the design of an authentic Bungalow garden? In order to answer these questions, it is helpful to look at the history of the Bungalow.

The Chicago Bungalow, like thousands of Bungalows built across the nation, arose out of an late nineteenth century design movement known as the Arts and Crafts movement.



Above: This typical Chicago Bungalow has been updated with a grand circular entry that reflects the circular window in the front door and the circular bay on the side of the house.

This movement sought to counter a sense of alienation from nature brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The Bungalow and its garden ushered in an era of simple living in harmony with nature that is just as appealing today as it was eighty years ago.

The Bungalow garden is based on the welcoming informality

of English cottage gardens. The essence is a variety of plants—shrubs, perennials, and annuals—informally arranged so that they would grow together into a dynamic living tapestry of texture and color throughout the seasons.

Since the desired appearance is casual and natural, anyone can create an authentic Bungalow garden with a little observation and careful planning. Since Bungalow yards are small, a Bungalow garden is affordable to install and easy to maintain.

Design Considerations

Landscaping the Bungalow begins with making a wish list of your needs and desires. After making a list, you should make an assessment of the site. Make a copy of the plat of survey that you received when you bought your Bungalow and use it to make notes as you walk around the yard. This is going to be different for each of us. What areas are sunny? What area would make an ideal location for a patio? Where are the kids going to play? Also indicate what plantings need to stay and go.

Many Bungalows were built on narrow lots, which limits plantings to the front and back yards. The front yard is the public realm and the back the private. The approach to your front door should be inviting. Many Bungalows have overgrown foundation plantings like yews and junipers that detract from the appearance of the house. Often they have been pruned improperly for years leading to unnatural shapes. Consider removing shrubs that have taken over the front yard. An alternative to replacing them in the same location is to create an outdoor receiving room by moving plantings out into the yard. This also allows you to see the plantings from inside your home.

Most Bungalows had decorative features like urns, which sat on the pier at the end of the front stairs. They also had window boxes, which sat on stone brackets sticking out of the front of the house. Unfortunately many Bungalows have lost these details. Replacing them is an easy way to restore the historic look of your Bungalow. Several options are available.

These ornaments were traditionally made of cast stone. Many garden centers have large collections of planters. Avoid buying imitation stone or plastic containers. One of the major tenants of the Arts and Crafts period was authenticity of materials. A stone planter has the added advantage of resisting breakage from winter freezing. Many finer garden centers sell authentic reproduction planters in styles suitable for the Bungalow.

Until recently, large stone window boxes were hard to find—many of them measured over 70 inches long. A

company by the name of New Lenox Statuary is now offering a selection of cast stone window boxes designed specifically for Bungalows. (See sources below.) Alternatively replacement window boxes can be made of wood. In either case, make sure replacement window boxes that are at least as deep as the bracket and extend a well beyond the brackets on each end. All containers must have holes for drainage.

Plant these using a combination of plants with contrasting colors and textures. Annual add bright colors and perennials can add bold foliage. This might go something like this: Purple fountain grass for height, ageratum for the mid level and sweet potato vine trailing down. Always stuff the container as full as you can, generally pot-to-pot is a good idea. Remember to water often—perhaps even daily once established—and your planters will look great all summer. Unfortunately perennials in this situation will have to be treated as annuals as the winter freeze-thaw cycle will prevent them from surviving unless they are planted in the garden in fall.

Back yards often benefit from enclosure for privacy. The look of a fence has a major impact on the overall look of the yard, especially when the plantings are young. Fences in the Arts and Crafts style were often made from lattice, which allows air to circulate, and provides the opportunity to plant climbing vines. Not all areas need the fence to be the same height. Lowering the fence in areas will extend your view beyond your yard making it feel more spacious.

Because the Bungalows were conceived as a utilitarian home and built to be economical, walkways and patios were usually made of concrete that was laid out in rectilinear lines. Many of these walkways have deteriorated over the years and are in need of replacement. When replacing deteriorated walkways or patios, use natural materials that represent the place you live. If you choose to use brick, select a color that picks up on the color of the existing brick on the house. Brick can be expensive, but many companies offer lower cost point paving products. If you choose to

use stone, use stone from local quarries. These materials naturally fit in our surroundings.

When building a new patio, leave a buffer between the house and the patio to fill with plantings. This will soften the transition and make the patio feel more inviting. This buffer—think of it as a planting bed—should be deep enough to have room for a few layers of plants.

People often forget to think about how much space is needed to accommodate plants. For example, a perennial border needs to be at least three to four feet deep. The depth of shrub border can vary greatly depending on the kind of plant. The smallest shrubs available spread at least three feet. To avoid the soldiers in a row effect, make planting beds as large as your yard will accommodate. If space allows, extend a planting bed partially around a patio. This will provide space for fragrant flowers close to the patio.

The old straight sidewalks tend to hug the fence along the property line. If you are replacing a walkway, take the opportunity to push some or the entire walk away from the fence to provide room for a planting bed of shrubs. If you choose not to upgrade your fence as well, this will help to screen it and provide more enclosure for your yard. If the cost of replacing a narrow walk is prohibitive, placing a course of bricks along side a walk can help to widen it without the cost of replacement.

Plant Selection

Choosing plants that are fitting to a Bungalow is easy. One of the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement was capturing the experience of nature's seasonality. Trees and shrubs are some of the plants that express this best. In the landscape trade we call plants with season-long interest, four-season

plants. Many plants offer flowers in spring, beautiful fall color and interesting berries or bark. Mixing evergreen and deciduous plantings like the bright red berries of chokeberries and viburnums with boxwoods or junipers creates beautiful contrasts. (See the plant list below for more selections.)

Imagine a hawthorn tree outside your window. In spring it is flush with tiny white blossoms. As fall approaches the shiny green summer leaves change to a stunning russet-



Above: A circular patio, surrounded by plantings that buffer the harshness of the back wall of the house, gives the sense of a destination for escape from the cares of the day.

red. The leaves drop forming patterns on the ground and heavy crops of red berries are unveiled. And as the first snow begins to fall, the branches and berries are cloaked with snow. This is the quintessential Arts and Crafts experience of nature.

Other Bungalow favorites included hollyhocks, lilies, columbine, peony, nasturtium and petunias. This list is not unlike the favorites of gardeners today. But what



Above: Combine bold, circular leaves of plants like Leopard's Bane with grasses like this Japanese Hakone grass for impressive textural combinations. Both of these plants do well in shade.

is important to recognize, is that original Bungalow gardens included a wide range of plant types. Trees and shrubs provide the framework while annuals, perennials, vines, ferns and bulbs add to the seasonality. Any good garden—especially a Bungalow garden—should be highly diversified.

Another principle of Arts and Crafts gardens was the use of local plants. To be authentic, include as many plants indigenous to the Chicago area as is practical. Because these plants evolved in our climate they will require less care.

It is interesting that the resurgence of interest in Bungalows today coincides with a longing for the same values as the movement they arose from 100 years ago. Where people at the turn of the 20th century felt alienated from nature by the industrial revolution, and sought refuge in the garden, people today are struggling with a similar need to escape from technology. The Bungalow and its garden can offer a sense of escape from technology and reestablish our connection to nature.

Midwest Bungalow Plant List

Four Season Shrubs

Cranberry Viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*)
Boxwood (*Buxus* 'Green Gem')
Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina* 'Laciniata')
Rugose Rose (*Rosa rugosa*—many varieties)
Blue Boy Holly (*Ilex meservae* 'Blue Boy and Blue Girl')
Annabelle Hydrangea (*Hydrangea* 'Anabelle')
Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*)
Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)
Four Season Trees
Canarti Juniper (*Juniperus Virginiana* 'Canaertii')
Winter King Hawthorn (*Carataegus viridis* 'Winter King')
Seven Sons Tree (*Heptacodium miconoides*)
River Birch (*Betula nigra*)
Kentucky Coffee-tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)
Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*)

Perennials

Peony
Iris
Poppy
Dame's Rocket
Dianthus
Coneflower
Bluebells
Foxglove

Annuals

Nasturtium
Marigold
Verbena
Gomphrena
Morning glory
Nicotiana
Alysum
Zinnia



Above: Conflower, a midwestern native combines with Crocosmia, a summer bulb that returns year after year and freely multiplies.