

OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

for the (sometimes overwhelmed) DIY Gardener

Northwest Flower & Garden Festival 2026 | [Lorene Edwards Forkner](#)



Gardeners are dreamers and the world is filled with inspiration. But with so many possibilities it's easy to get overwhelmed. Optimism and motivation quickly turn to overstimulation and fatigue.

Help is here. Answer the following questions *before* you begin your next garden project and you'll be on your way to creating a personal growing space that fits your life like a favorite garden glove. And remember — we cultivating a sense of place not just decorating a space.



Rumination



What is your **HAPPY PLACE**?

Where did you hang out as a kid? What is your favorite vacation destination?
What is your favorite time of year?

It's not about replicating an illusory landscape but creating a visual and emotional echo of meaningful personal landscapes in the real garden outside your backdoor.



How will you **USE** your garden?

Private getaway? Party central? Urban farmstead?

Create a laundry list of ALL the roles you'd like your landscape to play in your life and PLEASE don't forget to leave room for relaxing AND the garbage cans. Over plant every scrap of earth and you'll just tip over exhausted into the perennials.

Now, prioritize those uses. Which are the most important to you? Time flies and priorities shift. A garden should follow along and keep up with us – not the other way around.

Rumination cont.



When are you AVAILABLE to spend time in your garden? Plant accordingly.

Do you work long hours? An evening garden filled with light colored flowers and fragrance will lure you outside. Don't forget lighting!!!

Site winter garden highlights along a pathway or where they can be seen from a window snug within the comfort of indoors.



Inspiration



Repeat elements of your home's architecture to unite house and garden.

City high rise, suburban ranch, or Grammy's cottage? If you live in a brick house consider using bricks to edge garden beds or outline a pathway.

Likewise, choose a limited palette of materials — however humble they may be — if used intentionally will appear more sophisticated than a hodgepodge of far more expensive materials.



How does the existing space work?

Welcoming entryway? Dominating driveway? Fabulous views or nosy neighbors?

Too often the driveway in the front yard has more of a presence than the walkway welcoming people to our door. Focus on creating an inviting entry with a human scale.

This is a good time to look at access to water and utility space.



Where do you LIVE? It's a lot of work to pretend otherwise.

You CAN have your tropical paradise just please don't fill it with tropical plants — or if you do prepare to have your horticultural heart broken again and again. Our landscapes are illusions of our ideal environment. We're cultivating a sense of place not just decorating a space. Wouldn't you love to cultivate peace of mind alongside your peas and carrots or poppies and grasses.



Perspiration

How much TIME are you available and willing to allot to your garden?

One hour a week? 10 hours a week? Daylight hours every week?

If you regularly go on an extended summer vacation, plan your garden display to crest around that time.

Who will care for the garden?

You? Your kids (good luck!)? Outside help?

Ah, the M word. MAINTENANCE is the often forgotten underbelly of garden making. With lots of ideas and nursery tables bursting with horticultural temptation it's easy to get carried away. The garden in our mind's eye is as big as the whole outdoors, instead of the tiny little city lot where we in fact live.

What is your budget?

\$... \$\$\$... budget???

Be creative, resourceful and realistic.



Lorene Edwards Forkner is a gardener as well as an author, maker, and speaker whose work centers on exploring the wonders of the natural world. She is a regular contributor to the "GROW" column in Pacific NW Magazine that appears in *The Seattle Times*. Lorene is the author of several books including the recently released titles from Timber Press, *Growing Great Vegetable in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia*.

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