

Clemson Horticulture Student Essay

Breaking the Norm

By John Robert Dinkins



Do you like to blend in or stand out? When designing your own yard would you rather conform or give your yard a pop with exciting originality and represent a background of your own culture? Well according to authors in *Landscape and Urban Planning*, "Results suggest that for American front yard landscapes, the cultural norm to conform to what the neighbors appear to prefer is stronger than cultural norms that favor particular conventional landscape characteristics." (Dayrell, Nassauer, Wang. 2009, p. 290).

While I don't currently own a front yard, nor do I have a particular design I plan on implementing, I think I can say that I want to display a sense of my culture in the design of my yard – even if it is not what my neighbors may prefer. With that said, the survey results from the study mentioned above can be further investigated in several ways.

First, a second source of information on preferences of individual's versus the overall neighborhood view needs to be taken into account from an additional study published in a peer reviewed journal. Next, the voice of a landscape designer with experience with

developing neighborhood plans should be heard. And from my own experience; I've seen many neighborhoods with mundane neutral landscapes installed with only maintenance and proficiency in mind and not the whole picture of providing a landscape where the owner can feel at home.

In my past, I would visit my grandmother's rural country home where she had a beautiful camellia garden planted in her side yard. During these visits, my mother made it a point every time to walk through the camellia garden. Today I have a great appreciation of the camellia garden at the South Carolina Botanical Gardens as it gives me a sense of connection with my past of fond memories visiting the rural country home where my family was. One thing I plan on implementing into my own landscape one day is a camellia garden.

With "going against the grain" as my view I think it is important to take into account the counter argument to what I have proposed. A Home Owners Association may require yards to conform to a certain standard and look. By allowing the landscape to solely suit the owner, the value of the homes in the neighborhood could be negatively affected if it's considered bad taste. With these factors in mind I think an idea should be presented to a designer or possibly the HOA for an approval. This could satisfy both the owner of the landscape and the neighborhood.

While being respectful of the rest of the neighborhood I will initiate a movement where landscape owners do not just conform to a sense of oneness in a neighborhood but instead will spark creativity, cultural awareness, and individuality in a way that can reflect itself beautifully in the landscape. It could all start with my one change of breaking the norm with a culturally minded landscape installation.

John Robert Dinkins is a student in Dr. Vincent's Sustainable Landscape Garden Design CT2 class where students write critical thinking essays each week based on class readings.

