

WHY PAVE PARADISE?

Softscape Landscaping *for* Bay-Friendly Garden Rooms



By Jillian Steinberger, 2010 Bay-Friendly Conference, 9/17/10

What is Softscape Landscaping?

“They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.” – Joni Mitchell

- Driven by belief in the inherent integrity of raw, undeveloped landscapes.
- Structure is found within the landscape, not imposed upon it – avoids permanent resurfacing (e.g., concrete).
- Site analysis is important: are there large existing features like boulders, terraces, large trees, a creek, what is drainage like? Etc.
- By maximizing permeable space, softscapes retain moisture, biomass and nutrients, resulting in a thriving soil microbiology. Natural systems remain intact.

What Are Garden Rooms?

It means different things to different people...

- From a straight design point of view, garden rooms provide functional space for lifestyle activities: *al fresco* dining, parties, telecommuting, yoga, meditation, romance, camping, outdoor bedrooms, etc. etc.
- It is about organizing space, creating “flow” / circulation / access around a property; it is about making space functional; bringing clarity to space.
- At a utopian level it is about “owning” personal green space as actual livable space. Reclaiming it from “secondary” or “extra” status, blurring the line between what’s inside and what’s out.
- The idea *trends against* McMansions or developments where the house takes up the entire lot – there is usually some “lonely square footage” just outside the backdoor, waiting to be “moved into.”

In this 2000 SF yard in Oakland there is: an oasis, an orchard, a pocket park, a dining room, a reading room, an edibles area, deck space, potting area, storage.





**Veggie mound
contiguous to
oasis**

**Sukkah /
reading
room**

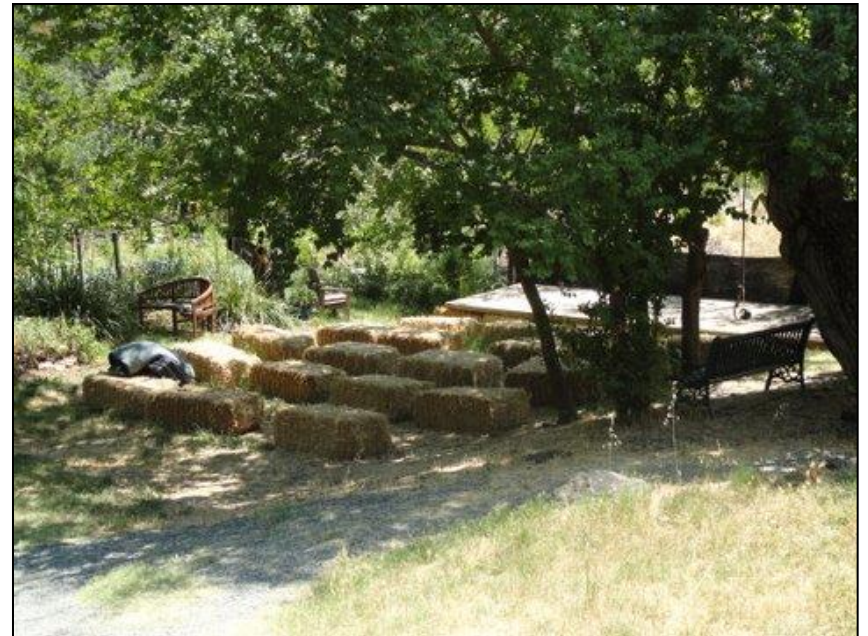


Pocket park

Other Garden Rooms, Lake County



A sculpture garden, with bench (at right)



Outdoor theatre w/straw bales for seating

Softscaped “Rooms”

Ingrid Martin, Earthly Sites



Emeryville, CA. In extreme hardscape conditions, you do what you can to keep things soft.



So how is softscape landscaping Bay-Friendly?

Well, consider the “Seven Bay-Friendly Principles”:

1. Landscape Locally
2. Landscape for Less to the Landfill
3. Nurture the Soil
4. Conserve Water
5. Conserve Energy
6. Protect Water & Air Quality
7. Create Wildlife Habitat

Softscaping supports the Bay-Friendly Principles in the following ways:

- Softscapes can utilize greenwaste onsite as a source of landscape materials, (e.g., mulch and compost). Think of it as super-local “harvesting.”
- One result is energy conservation because there is reduced need to truck in materials from elsewhere, *plus* we have less to truck off to the landfill.
- Keeping greenwaste onsite builds biomass, thereby nurturing the soil and conserving water by creating “spongelike” conditions on the ground. This retains soil moisture and ultimately helps replenish local aquifers.
- This is great for habitat. In these conditions, soil microorganisms thrive and are the basis for a vibrant soil-foodweb. Worms begin to converge because they love these conditions. Once the worms move in, the birds come and fertilize. The plants start to bounce, and...the process builds on itself.
- Softscaped gardens often have no weed, pest or disease issues. Yep, it’s true.

Re-Purposing ("Recycle & Re-use")

- In found objects and materials, there is *charm*, *practical value*, *budget-consciousness*, and *sustainability* – a lot of garbage is not trash!
- Shiny and new are still the dominant look – that means a lot of good stuff goes to the landfill.

Building Materials: Urbanite & Old Bricks

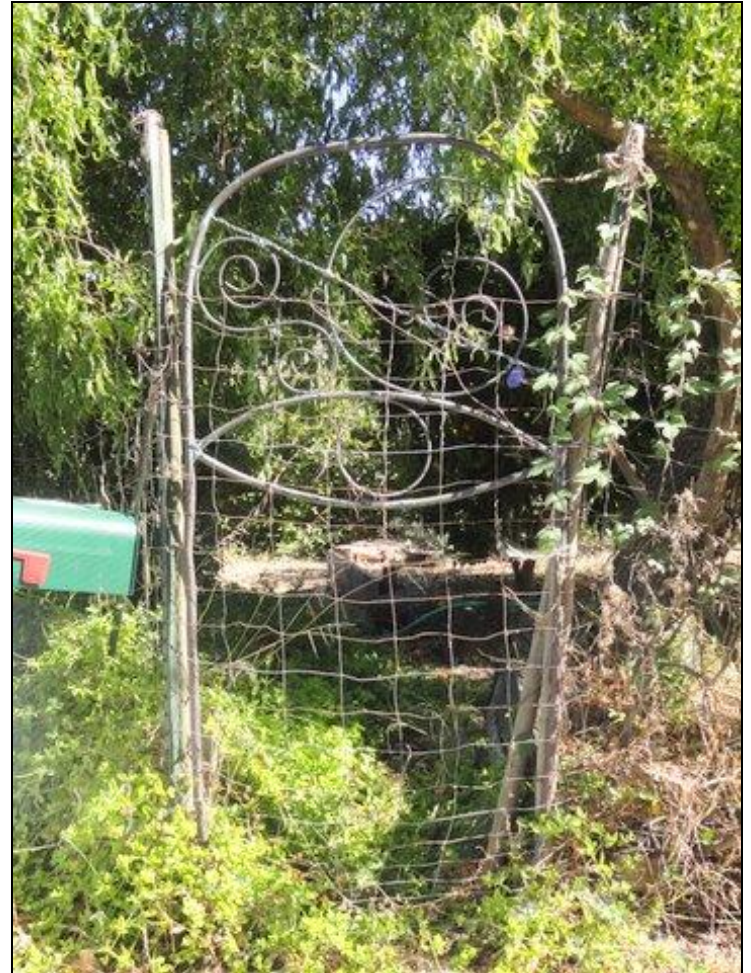


Raised Beds from Prunings and Found Materials





Old Fencing



Old Furniture

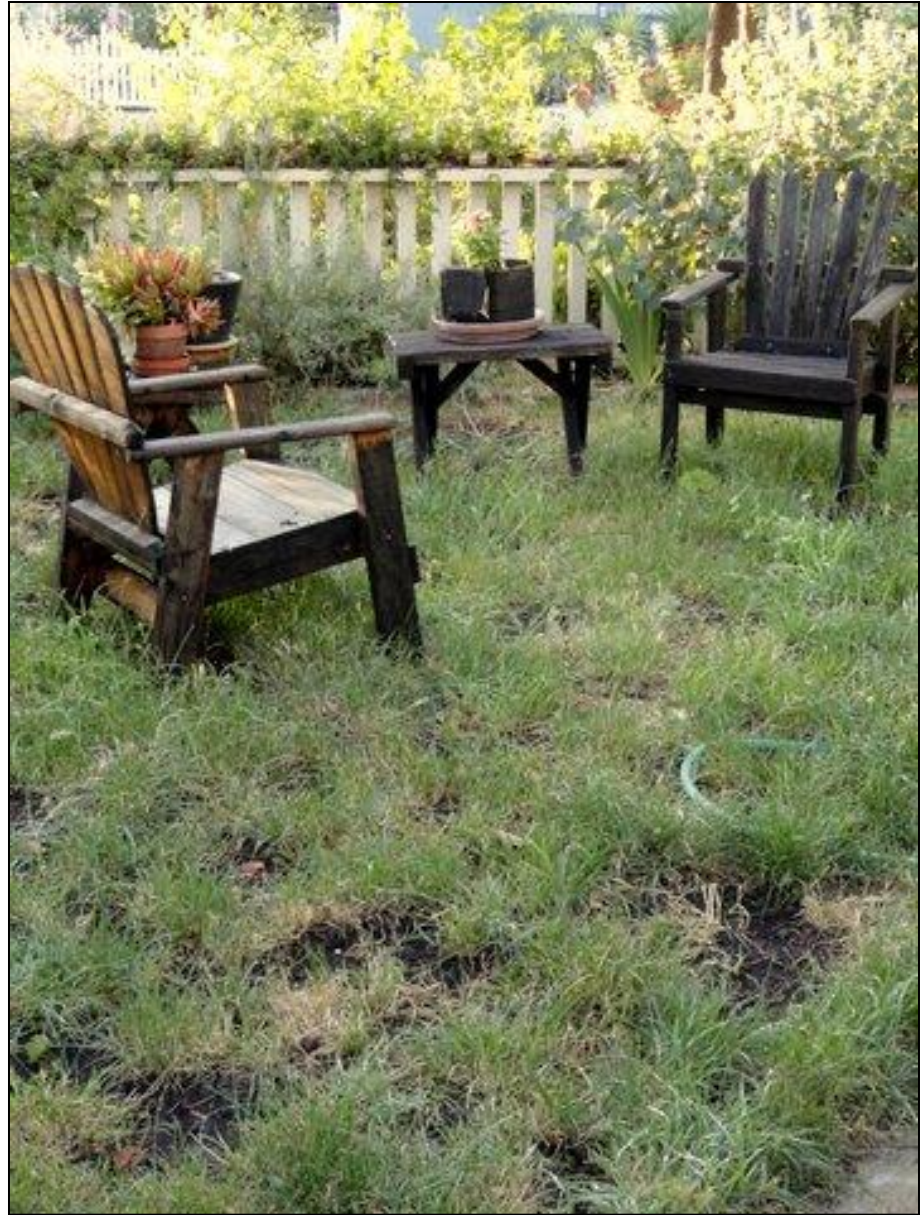


Table legs that plants can grow on.



**A table
bottom
makes a
useful
support for
melons.**

Adirondack chairs from put-out day in Albany





Broken terra cotta containers

Natural Mulch Effects

- Try using contrasting mulches – bark, chipped trees, leaves, gravels, etc. – to define space as you would carpet, linoleum, tile, wood floors, etc., indoors.
- Select plants in advance with leaves that are desirable for mulch!
- You can create contours with mulch out of flat space



**The “forest floor effect”:
Incense Cedars and Douglas Fir, Carlin Falls, Yosemite**



Huge Deodar Cedar and Incense Cedar provide natural mulch for weed control and aesthetics.



Seasonal color



From Ribes variety (native current)



Mulch from tree trimmings.



This is the same path, after mellowing, with sawdust tossed on to give fresh look – “layering.”



Leaves make a stunning mulch.

**Don't
send
those
leaves
to the
landfill!**



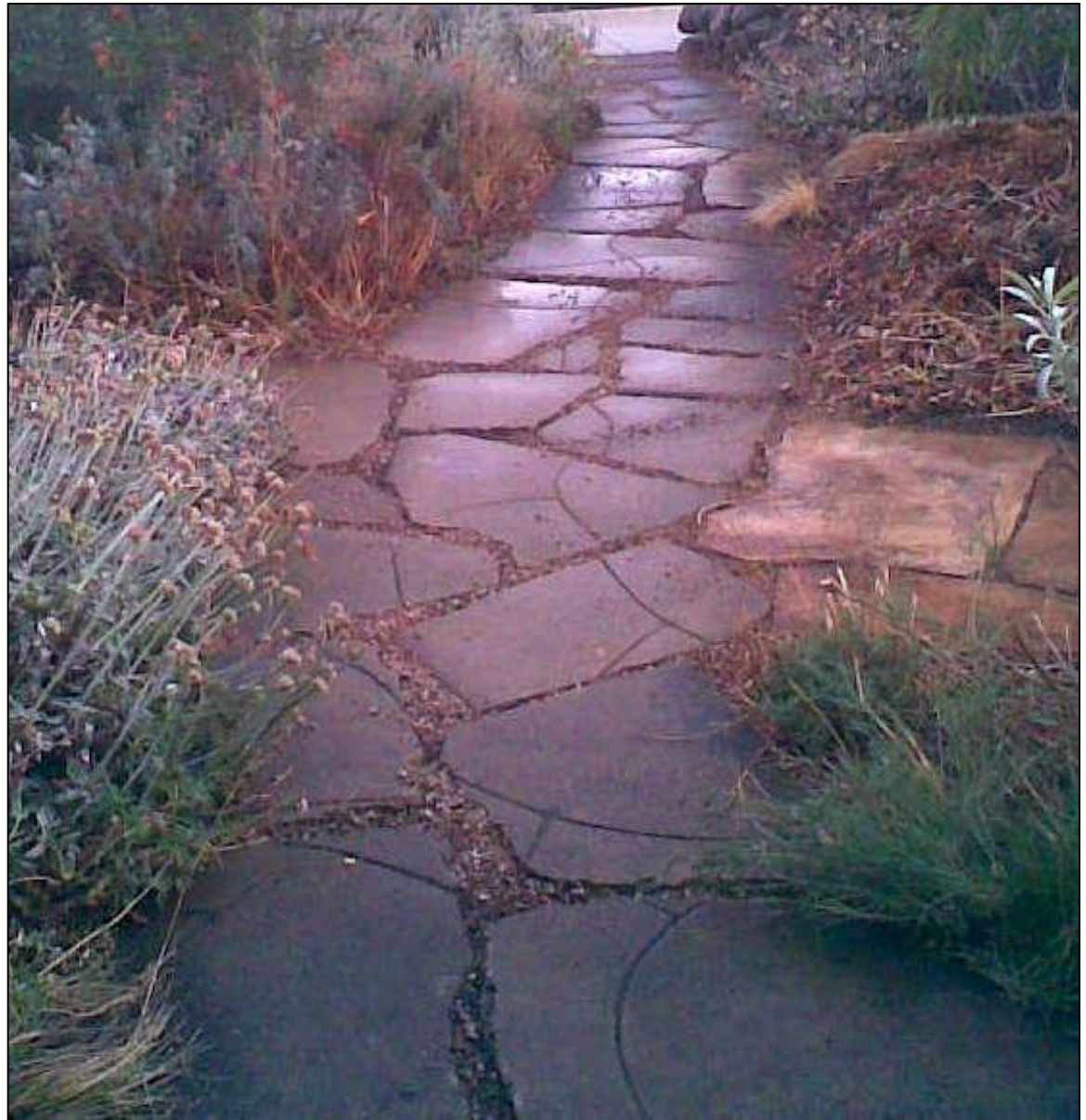
And bark, of course.



Permeable Walkways – Paths

- A wide variety of natural materials offer safe, clean comfortable walking surfaces
- Different materials offer a wide spectrum of textures and looks

Urbanite walkway through a natives garden



Straw path through Permaculture Garden at Merritt College, Oakland



**Gravel path
through
insectary,
Lake County**



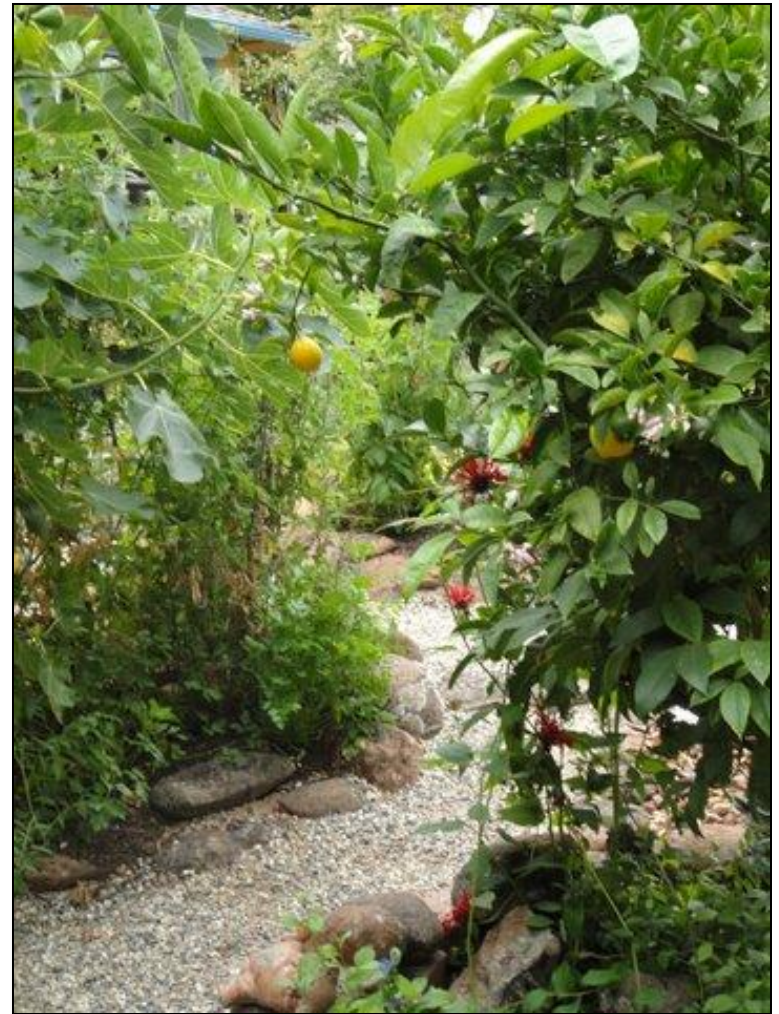


**“Collage”
path at my
test garden:
everything
is “found”**

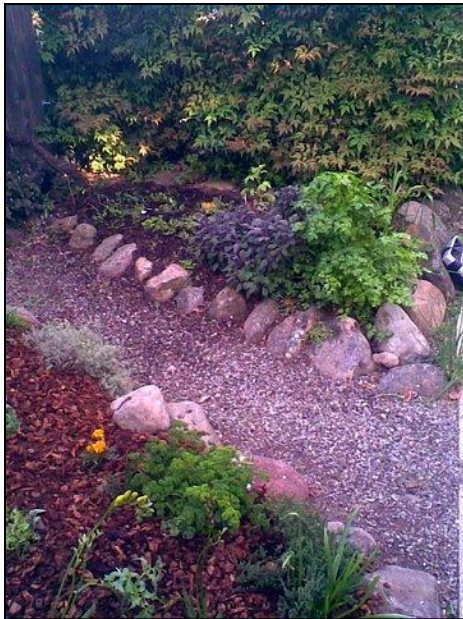
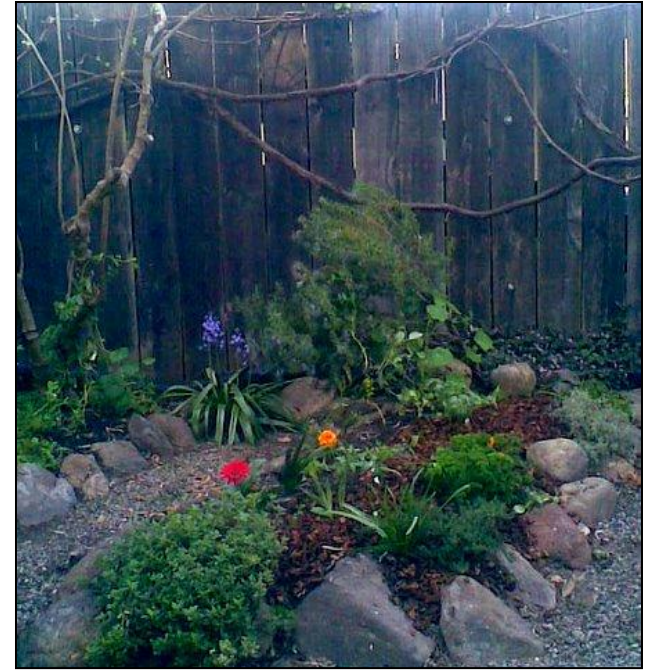


Path through a “church garden,” Pleasant Hill

A meditation path in Oakland, Spring 2010



A juncture in the path: Where Fig, Meyer lemon, bee balm and tomatoes come together, Summer 2010...



**Gravel and
rock access
paths to
veggie
beds**

Plants for Structure

Plantings can emphasize lines and define space; they can even create walls and entire structures.

A bamboo “wall”



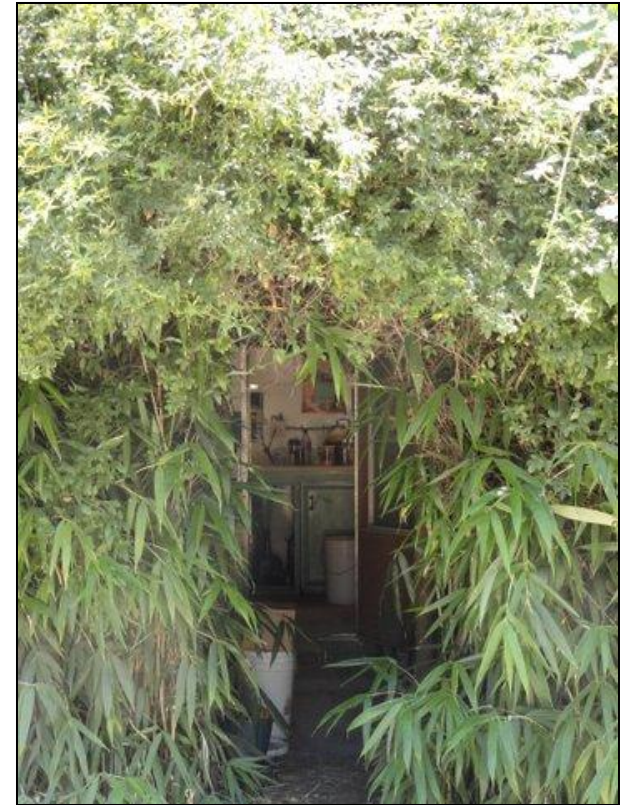
A 125' Mexican bamboo hedge completely blocks the view to the property on the other side, and does so attractively.

Vine Coverage



Vines help insulate the house; they can be espaliered to make a completely enclosed room out of the porch.

A bamboo “house”



Bamboo enshrouds this small house, acting as insulation against cold and heat.

An insectary wall in Lake County.

Amaranth, native sunflowers, verbascum, and other tall insectary plants decorate a greenhouse wall, and set the space off.



A few insectary plants...



Echinacea, Hollyhock,
Lemon Balm, Verbascum,
Yarrow... And there are
so many more blooming
insectary plants.

Other ideas: Edibles



Perennial Wall: An insectary wall or hedge with comfrey, borage, botanical sages and composite family plants (daisies).

Spring-Summer: Pole beans climbing up a “wall of corn” or sunflowers, with marigolds up front. Native American method.

Fall-Winter

- Interplant broccoli, brussel sprouts or walking stick kale (the pretty yellow flowers attract bees) with white-flowering arugula and red-leaf mustard greens like “Red Giant.” Gorgeous border.

Fruiting “Walls”

- Hedged berries or citrus or apples
- Espaliered apples or pears

Wrapping Up...

