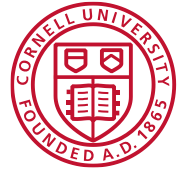


Cornell Cooperative Extension

Cornell Garden-Based Learning



Introduction to Garden Design

Fall 2026 Course Syllabus

Instructor: Donna Alese Cooke dmc72@cornell.edu

Course Overview

This online course teaches the basics of preliminary site analysis and ornamental garden design techniques, and how to design an ornamental landscape, for friends, family and/or potential clients. Participants learn how right plant right place principles provide the foundation for a healthy and attractive garden design.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, participants will:

- Perform site analysis, collect site data and determine environmental elements of a proposed garden space, and use this data to create a base map that will serve as the foundation of a garden plan.
- Determine garden and landscape styles and designs that are appealing.
- Articulate a personal style and functionality that meets individual needs and goals.
- Identify and apply garden design principles for proper plant selection, placement, and seasonal interest.
- Recognize an ecological approach to garden design through diversity and inclusion of native plants and plants that attract beneficial wildlife.
- Utilize design strategies to deter unwanted wildlife and invasive species.
- Create and present a personalized garden design with hand-drawn or digital graphics.

Course Schedule: Fall 2026

- August 25-28: **Welcome & Introductions**
- August 31-September 3: **Module 1, Site Assessment I**
- **No Class September 4-7**
- September 8-11: **Module 2, Site Assessment II; Garden Styles**
- September 14-18: **Break week**
- September 21-25: **Module 3, Design Principles I; Creating a Plan**
- September 28-October 2: **Module 4, Design Principles II: Design Elements; Seasonal Interest; Plant Combinations**
- October 5-9: **Module 5, Design III: Plant Selection; Your Garden in Plan & Elevation Views**

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Diversity and Inclusion are a part of Cornell University's heritage. We are a recognized employer and educator valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities.

- October 12-16: Module 6, **Plant Placement; Final Garden Design**

***Note:** although the last day of class is October 16th, you will have until October 21st to submit your Final Design Project. Students will have access to the course until November 5, 2026*

Zoom Q&A Sessions & Office Hours

Zoom sessions are a real-time opportunity get together virtually and interact with each other, ask questions, and share ideas. Sessions are suggested for this course and recorded if you miss them. Zoom meetings are on Tuesday evenings at 7pm EST on September 1, 8, 22, October 6, and 20.

Use this link for each session:

<https://cornell.zoom.us/j/5108598970?pwd=JYzFPtYDi3tHYycqBTcRRcQiWap6ZH.1&omn=95832627199> ID 510 859 8970. Passcode. 749417

Instructor office hours are available on an individual basis and scheduled on the alternate weeks of the Zoom sessions. Please reach out to the instructor to schedule a personal meeting.

Course Philosophy & Approach

This course focuses on exploration of basic garden design techniques that will encourage self-expression through hands-on activities, design work, group discussion, and reflective writing. You will perform the proper steps of site assessment, with hands-on activities that demonstrate a property's ecosystem, characteristics, and existing elements. Participants use real-world design techniques and strategies of proper plant selection and placement.

What to Expect

This class is asynchronous and self-paced in its design, where single topics are opened each week and build upon each other. Participants are expected to keep up with weekly assignments and activities, participate in online group discussions, do hands-on activities, and submit design work and reflective journals. An online presence through interactive discussion forum is essential. It provides an opportunity to ask questions while learning and growing together with classmates.

Students spend approximately 10 hours each week with the content and assignments, however more time may be needed to explore additional resources added each week. For peace of mind and time management, we suggest that each assignment is submitted by its due date. Given the flexible nature of a distance learning environment, it is easy to fall behind and lose out on what could be a very valuable learning experience. Being well organized and current with assignments help participants get the most out of this course.

Course Content & Lessons

Weekly topics open each Monday, and required assignments are generally due on or before the following Monday. Each weekly topic contains lessons and include the following components:

- A series of lessons that present each weekly topic.
- Readings and videos to reinforce or expand upon the material presented.
- Hands on activities and assignments that help you develop a proposed site.
- Reflective writing that cultivates a thoughtful perspective and dialogue with the course instructor.
- Whole class forum with topics and questions for discussion, and a place to learn and share ideas with others.
- Additional and optional readings, activities, and resources.

There are site assessment activities at the beginning of the course that take place outdoors and require some time and planning to complete. Students who begin and complete these activities in a timely manner will experience success in this course. Once the site assessment is completed, most of the work can be accomplished indoors and does not require planning around weather and outdoor accessibility.

The final project is a completed garden plan which will reflect an evolving experience and information that has been learned throughout the course. The specific design, style, as well as the mode of executing the final plan will be a matter of each students' choice and preference.

Grading and Academic Integrity

While there are no accumulative grades for this course, all assignments are designed to help keep students on track and evaluate an understanding of the content. Assignments are expected to be completed on or before their due dates and will be evaluated to track progress.

Participants are expected to do their own work unless otherwise instructed (e.g. group work). Any assignments should be your original work done, and to avoid plagiarism, other people's work should be properly referenced. Works that are copied from other students or plagiarized in any way will not be graded or evaluated.

Required Textbook

Our main text is the 2023 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Landscape Design: Planning, Building and Planting Your Perfect Outdoor Space* by Chris Young (published by DK). There will be

chapters assigned with lessons as we move through the course. Older versions of this text do not align well with this course. During the first few weeks we will use *The Site Assessment Workbook*, by Charles Mazza, which is provided as a pdf in the course.

Materials and Supplies

Students will be sketching and drafting garden designs by hand, with templates, paper, overlays, colored markers, pens, and pencils. Google maps and surveyor maps of a property are helpful to have to create a base map, then overlays of tracing paper are used to sketch ongoing assignments. However, students who are more comfortable using a CAD program, Canva, design app, or other digital method, are welcome to use that for the drafting process and final design. Feel free to use a blend of both. *No art or design experience required!*

For hand-drawn designs we suggest:

- Drawing paper and grid-lined paper (to help drawing a plan to scale) and tracing paper for overlays. Paper size depends on the size of the garden area.
- A circle template with a good variety of sizes. A template with extremely large circles may not be needed, and a drawing compass can be used for very large circles. This is crucial when drawing plants on the plan.
- A Basic Set of Colored Pencils or Markers.
- Black Sharpies, one thin and one thick will usually cover all needs.
- A designated garden notebook as a place to store ideas, plant lists, budget items, prices, and observations.
- A computer with reliable high-speed Internet access (to view videos, view readings, submit assignments, and participate regularly in discussion forums).
- A device for scanning and/or photographing submissions of the final garden design.

Continuing Education Credits

This course is non-credit; however, we award the following to all who successfully participate and complete the course and all required assignments. CEU's are not automatically awarded. Should you wish to receive CEU's, please email dmc72@cornell.edu at the end of the course.

- Cornell University Continuing Education Credits: You may receive Continuing Education Units (CEUs)
- NYS Certified Teachers: Cornell Garden-Based Learning is an Approved Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) Sponsor from NYSED
- If you are post-secondary undergraduate or graduate student, explore the possibility with your faculty advisor of receiving credit for the course (typically as independent study) using your CEU's as evidence of your completion.

Revised August 2026