

**T**his weekend has been invigorating, innovative and exhausting. For seven years, there has

been a section in the back yard that has remained undefined. Walkways, a pond, a deck and a horse shoe pit were laid out by hand when our new home was first built. All were put in with personal sweat equity and enjoyed but this one area has waited for its purpose to unfold.

For seven long growing seasons, it has served simply as a holding spot for plants on their way in or their way out of the landscape. Well, with the increasingly warm beautiful weather and no more excuses, the time finally arrived when two horticulturists (my husband, Rog, also has a degree in the same area) arrived at the same conclusion at the same time. It was design time!

Armed first with nothing but a box of corn starch, I wandered out into the "wilderness" and defined the inner and outer planting bed edges as there would be a bed within a bed. A design had been bubbling in the back of my mind for quite some time. The need for a defined space to show off my husband's bonsai plants was the first priority. We talked with a good friend who is exceptionally skilled as a carpenter and he agreed to make the bench for us. The



bench design that we agreed upon is not unusual; rather, its dimensions and shape are limited by the timber we have left over from another home improvement project. A path, however, would be needed around the bench which would incorporate the bench as the main focal point. On the outside edge of the path, new planting areas would be developed. Because forty inch paths of red cedar chips already wander through the back yard, I trickled the corn starch using a measuring stick so that the new path around the bonsai bench outline would match the width of the existing paths. This method is simple for laying out bed design and easy to erase with a simple brush of the foot.

The next step in the design process was getting an okay from the other designer...a must do when there are two involved in the process. With a nod of acceptance, a tape

# Defining the Edge

by Anne Ditmer

measure came out to figure the amount of wood that would be necessary. The layout would require seven 12 foot lengths of pressure treated 2x6 boards.

(We use this thickness and this quality for a long lasting border edge that will last up to 10 years in the landscape). Rog made the trip to the local home improvement store that same afternoon. As soon as the boards arrived at home, he cut them with a circular saw at about 2 inch intervals along the board length, cutting through 2/3 of the board's thickness starting eight inches from one end and ending eight inches from the other end. The next morning, the boards were laid flat on the pavement, side by side and watered for five hours.

Now it was my turn again. Using a sharp flat-bladed planting spade, I dug a trench using the corn starch as my guide to the appropriate depth and width for the boards. They would need to be placed into the soil so that only the top 1/2" would appear above the grade. Cutting through roots and swatting at the persistent biting no-see-ums was definitely not fun; it was work! Once the trenches were dug, Rog and I carried the soaked boards to the area and laid each one in the trench. Having done this many times in the past did not make the task any easier this



time. It is very difficult to get 2x6 board to bend into the tightly defined curves of the bed outline we wanted. But with perseverance, each board was put into place, connected to one another by a piece of solid 10 inches of 2x6 drilled to them with wood screws. Twenty inch long pieces of 2x4 staubs (one end cut straight across; the opposite end cut into a "V") were used to help hold the boards into position along the curves, placed into position using a sledge hammer and also attached to the edging boards using wood screws and power drill. This task took the entire day. Because we were laying a path, it was important that the border board on one side was at the same height as the border board across from it. Here we used a long level going from one board across the path to the other.

The last step came this afternoon. Once again, using

the sharp flat bladed planting spade, I lowered the depth of the now defined path three inches for the addition of red cedar mulch. You might ask, where was Rog? Well, it seems he threw out his back wielding the sledge hammer and was a

bit indisposed, so he laid fresh pine mulch in the existing beds.

Sometime this week, a second visit to the local garden center will occur. Since we redo all the paths in the landscape every other year, I anticipate the buying and laying of some 50 bags of mulch, give or take a few. Right now the bags are on sale 3 for \$10. But before that job is done, sore muscles will need some time to rest. The funny thing is that I have actually enjoyed the hard work, the fresh air and the time with my husband doing something we both love. And we still get to decide on new plants for the exterior beds and how to set up the bonsai display in the center!



Anne Ditmer's Blooming Issues

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