

**Assignment 1:
Create Your Own Outdoor Magic
Assessing What You Have: A 15-Point Checklist**

Use the following to guide your observations. Take photos!

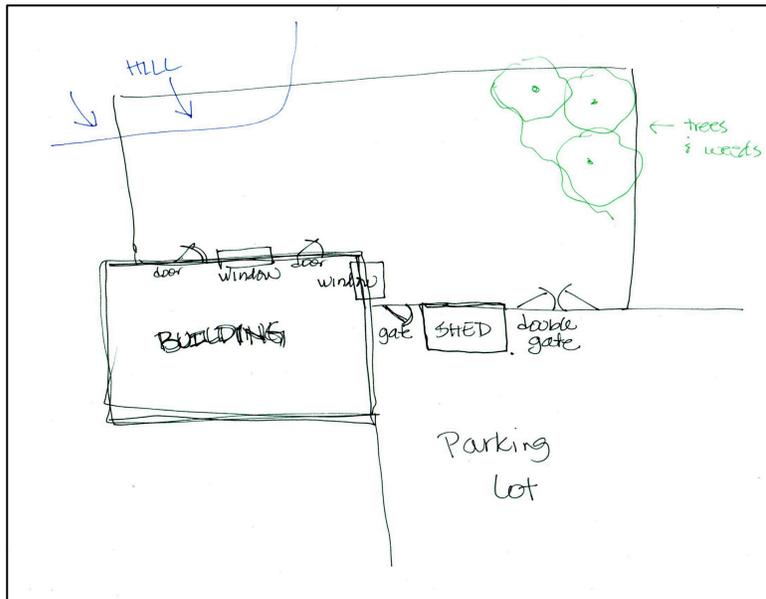
- 1) Really look at the site.
- 2) Notice the whole space—where are the edges? If there is a fence, it's clear, if not, what defines the space you'll be looking at? Notice the shape- is it square, long and narrow or irregular? Are there little niches and corners? Is the space adjacent to the building?
- 3) Is the space sheltered- enclosed by landforms, vegetation, buildings – or open?
- 4) Notice how one gets to the space, the exits and entries (doors from buildings, gates in the fence, paths leading in, etc)
- 5) Notice the terrain: flat/sloped- high spots that provide a view, low spots that feel protected.
- 6) Notice the soil/geology—rocky, sandy, clayey, outcroppings
- 7) Notice the vegetation (trees, especially special or problem ones, shrubs, grasses, perennials, lawn, underbrush, thorns—dense, open)
- 8) Are there other fixed features like outbuildings, walkways, play equipment that are staying or that you want to remove?
- 9) Pay attention to the sun/shade—from trees, buildings, etc. This may take observing at different times of day and seasons to get an accurate sense of where your sunny/shady areas are.
- 10) If there are windows to the space, notice what the views are.
- 11) Pay attention to views out of the space and think about framing what is good and screening what is unpleasant, loud or dangerous.
- 12) Check to see where the water sources are, where downspouts drain, where hose bibs are located.

- 13) Check to see where rain goes—is there a slope coming into or going away from the space? Are there depressions where puddles form?
- 14) Are there hazards that need to be addressed?
- 15) Are there other assets or problems in the space you want to note?

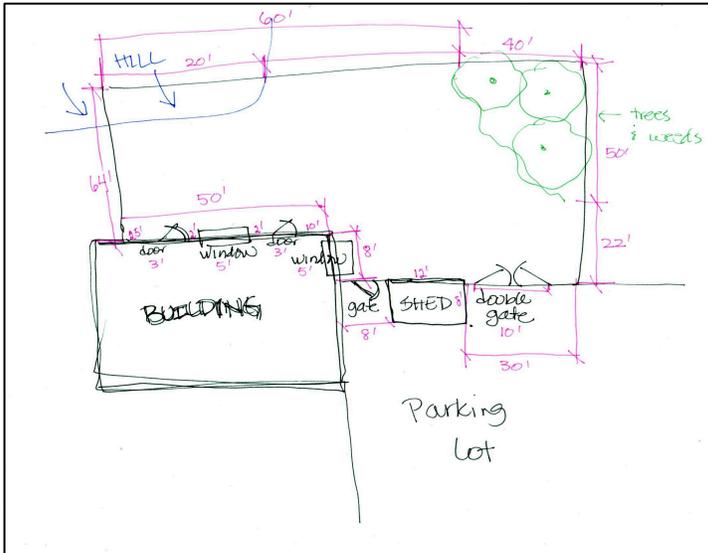
Now, write it down.

You may already have a site plan or plat of your site or you may be able to obtain one from your local planning office (in your town, city or county). If you do, you can use that as at least a starting point for assessing and documenting what you have, filling in details according to the instructions below. If you don't have any sort of a site plan, follow these instructions to create a plan from scratch.

Start by roughly sketching the perimeter of the space.

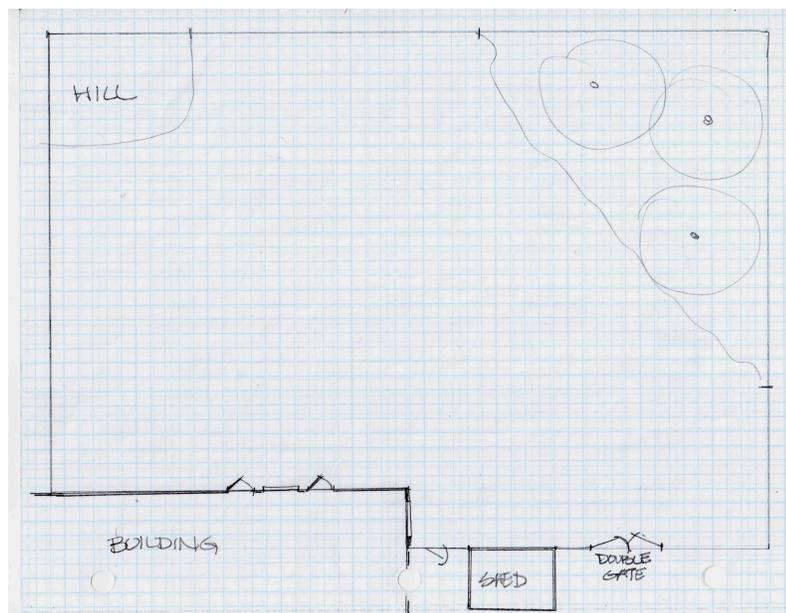


Next add the measurements to your rough sketch, either by measuring with a tape (this requires a partner) or pacing* it off. Use different colored pens or pencils to keep it legible. If you're using an existing site plan it's a good idea to measure something on your site that is shown on the plan to check its accuracy. You'd be surprised at how often these are off.

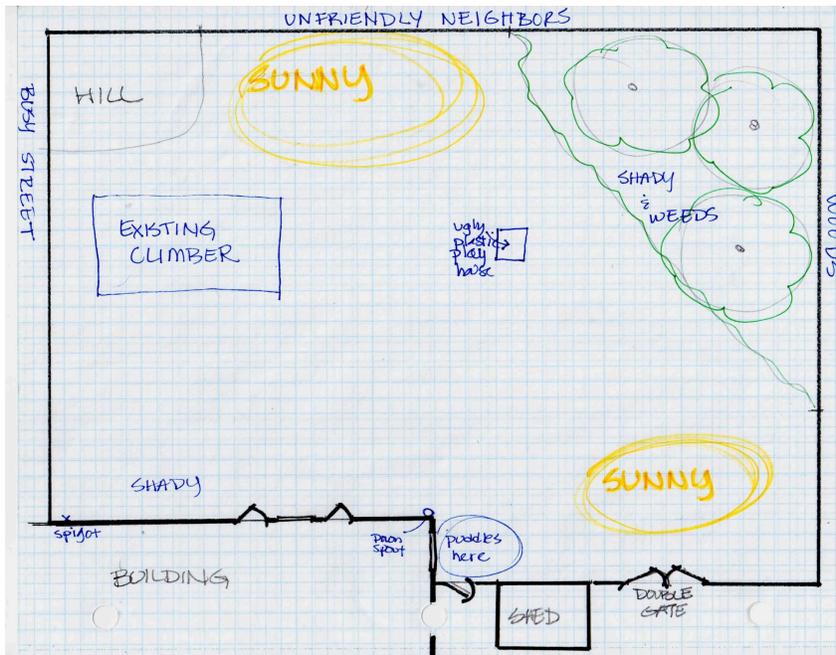


Then re-draw it onto the graph paper, this time making it to scale. (It only needs to be roughly accurate—we aren't doing anything to the inch!)

To figure out how to get a scale that will fit on your paper, it helps to know the overall length and width of the space. If it's irregular you need to know the longest and widest parts. The space in my example is 72' x 100' and I have graph paper that is 8.5 x 11. Divide 72' by 8" (the width of the paper leaving a little margin) and get 9; and divide 100' by 10" (the length of the paper leaving a little margin) and get 10. That means I can draw my plan so that 1"=10' and it will easily fit on my graph paper.



Draw in the fixed features, entries and exits, windows, water sources. I like to go over my pencil lines with sharpie. Now make lots of copies of your clean, accurate, base plan.



On one copy I note assets, problems, views to be screened or highlighted as well as the sunny and shady areas. (All the items suggested in #1-15 above)

If you haven't already, take some "before" pictures of the space, from lots of different angles. I stand in each corner and look across the space in every direction, and also take photos of problems, niches, assets, and anything else I want to be able to remember later when I'm designing.

*If you choose to pace it off, you first need to know the length of your pace. Calculate this by walking 10 steps at your normal, comfortable pace, measuring how far you walked, and dividing that by 10. This will give you the length of your average pace.