

HOME

VAIL VALLEY

REAL ESTATE & MOUNTAIN LIFESTYLES | JUNE 2015

VAIL BOARD OF REALTORS®

INSIDE
ARTISAN
FLOORS
—
ROCK
GARDENS
—
GROWN-UP
TREE HOUSES

TAKE IT OUTSIDE

Summer means backyard parties, outdoor retreats and other warm-weather perks

Visit vvhmag.com to read
our tablet and desktop edition

ROCK ON!

Design and build a beautiful rock garden

by MARTY JONES

IF YOU'RE ATTUNED TO NATURAL detail or if you're delighted in creating rock gardens as a child, then you're probably the type of person who will enjoy designing and building a rock garden of adult-sized proportions. But even if you've never liked getting your hands dirty, you can still benefit from the color and visual interest that rocks, and the plants that grow well with them, can bring to the areas surrounding your home.

Rock gardens often incorporate perennial plants and different-sized rocks arranged together in a purposeful way along an embankment or a natural slope. Rock gardens can also add natural accents to areas near a home entrance or along a driveway. But before you get started hauling heavy boulders into your yard, consider these essential aspects of any rock garden design and build project:

Plan the Project Size and Scope

Rock gardens can accentuate any landscape, but the size and scope of rock projects can range from small to mighty. In the project planning stages, consider location, budget, labor, and equipment needs. You may choose whatever location suits your landscaping goals, but rock gardens will likely be enjoyed more in higher traffic areas around your home, where you can see them each day.

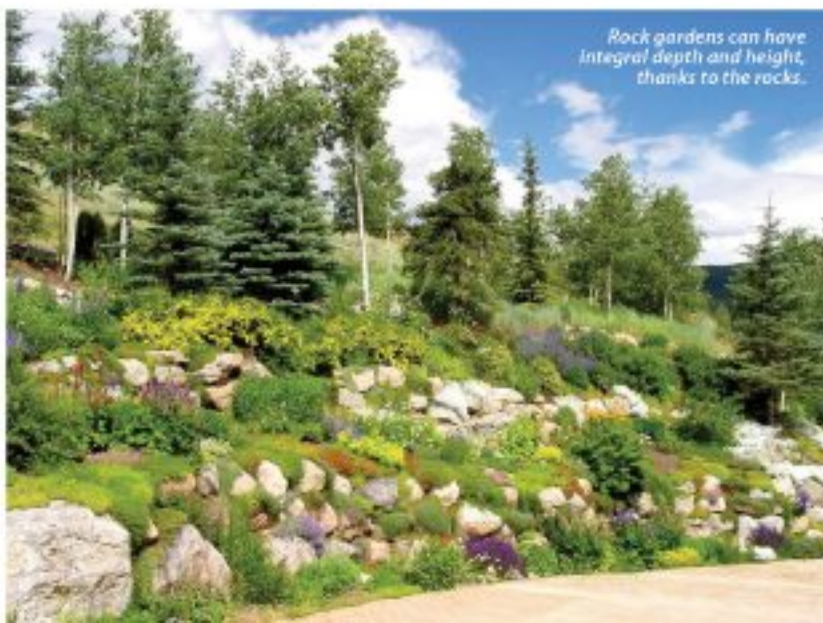
When building a rock garden, don't overestimate what you can do by yourself. One cubic foot of granite can weigh around 150 pounds, and even though other rock types such as limestone may be lighter, only small projects can be undertaken alone. So if you want to create



a large accent garden, make sure you incorporate labor and equipment costs into your plans.

Build the Base

In order to build a natural-looking rock garden, begin by first preparing the area's soil. Soften the existing ground, and mix in compost and pea gravel to create an ideal environment for growing plants in and around the rock garden. Compost enriches soil while gravel will help ensure adequate drainage. Look carefully at the rocks you plan on placing in the area, and note any natural



Rock gardens can have integral depth and height, thanks to the rocks.



lines showing the depth at which they may have previously been buried. Soften and amend the soil to a corresponding depth for natural-looking placement. Save remaining compost and gravel mixture to fill in crevices after rocks have been placed.

Arrange Rocks

Angular rocks of one rock type often work well in rock gardens that include a variety of plant colors and textures. Consider choosing rocks covered in lichens for additional visual interest. Partially bury rocks along naturally occurring soil lines in the soft base you've created, and place rocks in anticipation of plant growth. Fill in crevices with extra compost and gravel mixture to create spaces for planting.

If you're working on a large rock garden, secure equipment and labor assistance. Two people may be able to move

some rocks with a ball cart, but larger projects could require equipment such as backhoes, telehandlers, or skid loaders.

Choose Appropriate Plants

Plants that adapt well to small spaces will likely grow well in rock gardens, as will plants that grow successfully in low-water conditions. Water often drains quickly from rocky areas, and plant growth can be restricted by the spaces between rocks. Plants that grow less than a foot high can also be planted around rock gardens or in larger gaps between rocks.

Within these plant size and type suggestions, select plants based on the garden's aspect and location. Choose plants that grow well in full sun, for example, if the garden receives no shade. Many types of alpine plants and groundcovers are suited for rock gardens, including Ice Plant (*Delosperma*), Hens and Chicks (*Sempervivum* varieties),

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PINES & WILLOW HOME PARK





extra watering in the first year or two until they get more established. Take care to remove weeds so that the roots of new plants can get established. In the autumn months, cut back perennial plants that die to the ground, but leave woody perennials intact during the winter months, as you would with plants in

other garden areas. Many types of compact plants appropriate for rock gardens don't need to be pruned in the autumn months, so you can simply wait through the winter to enjoy them when they reappear in the spring.

Rock gardens can turn difficult-to-maintain landscapes into places of stunning natural beauty or simply add smile-worthy details to the areas around your home. The effort you put into designing and building a rock garden can also be enjoyed for years to come as color-popping perennial plants mature within the spaces you've created. [vva](#)

Creeping Speedwell (Veronica varieties), Creeping Phlox (such as Phlox subulata), and others suited for your garden's aspect and location. Create spaces in the soil between rocks, and bury the plant's roots, covering them with any leftover compost mixture; use tools such as a weeding blade or trowel to help create space and cover roots.

Care for Your Creation

Once planted in a rock garden, many plants simply need water and sunlight to grow, as they would in any other location. New rock garden plants may need



Marty Jones is the owner and manager of Colorado Alpines & Wildflower Farm in Edwards. Marty has lived in the Vail area since 1973, and his work with Colorado Alpines & Wildflower Farm has inspired extraordinary landscapes and gardens in the Vail Valley and beyond. Marty can be reached at marty@thewildflowerfarm.com.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR DREAM



611 Red Canyon Road • Edwards

With its perfect blend of stone, wood and hand-crafted metal finishes, this four-bedroom oasis offers 360-degree views and incredible outdoor spaces with no highway exposure. There's room to customize with a barn, out building, garage stalls or apartment. Water rights from the year-round stream provide the space and setting for a pond and/or waterfall feature to frame the incredible landscaping.

Offered at \$1,950,000



2414 Elliott Ranch Road • Vail

A rare opportunity to customize this quintessential Colorado homestead just 2.5 miles from Vail Village. Over two acres of land on the banks of Gore Creek; space to build a single-family home and enjoy the charming historic cabin as a guest cottage/bunk house. Come walk the land and see the options this unique parcel offers—gold medal fishing outside your door, and no Town of Vail transfer tax!

Offered at \$1,350,000

Slifer Smith
& Frampton
Real Estate

LIVE
LOCAL.

Ellyn Courtois
(970) 331-8232

ecourtois@slifer.net
BestHomesInVail.com

