



Art in the garden can be anything placed into the garden space that creates emotion. What that emotion is should be up to you, the gardener. There are so many material choices for expression – metal, stone, concrete, plastic. Display options are almost limitless through installation pieces, moving dynamic presentations, stationary statuary, worn and settled antiques, or portable modern. Whatever combination of materials and display you choose it should reflect your taste, likes, and dislikes. It should feel like a necessary component of your taste and garden space expression. Freedom to create is utterly fantastic, yet somehow it makes the choices more difficult. Breathe deeply and take it one small step at a time. When looking at your garden and the choice and placement of an object, consider the overall space. Decide what you want the artwork to do. Look at use, flow and surrounding elements. Jot down whether you want to accentuate certain areas, soften harsh surfaces, or mask those “not so great” features. Let yourself be inspired to accentuate with a hard vertical line or relax into the softness of a curve, dare to inspire your visitors, excite senses, calm the spirit, or just let your mind have a place to wander freely. But try to make a decision or two as it must be really time consuming to have it all.

For many years metal in the garden was found strictly in the functional category. And there are lots of great pieces that still serve very functional and utilitarian needs – watering cans, fencing, chairs. Usable seating that withstands the elements is an important part of the north. For the true gardener, sipping a hot cup of tea, coffee or cocoa on a snow covered bench, in the middle of winter is art in itself. And don't we all have those odds and ends in the shed that we just can't bring ourselves to throw out? Go shed diving. Use those well loved and not so sturdy pieces as a composition study of a garden still life. The beautiful thing is that if those pieces suffer a bit of weather or human traffic wear – they will just acquire more rust, I mean, character. Don't limit yourself to leftover goodies – even though they are loads of fun to play with. There are so many fantastic artisans working in metal that it is hard not to find a good artistic piece to bring into the home landscape. Style selections used to be somewhat limited, with many pieces needing a special order. But there is a bit of everything readily available now – Folk Art, Traditional, Gothic, French Country, Victorian, Arts and Crafts. It is so great to see easy to assemble stylized metal gazebos making their way into the mainstream garden furniture market. Even hanging containers can be tremendously beautiful works of art (without the plants!?) in the land of metal.

An affinity for stone and concrete - you either have it or you don't. If you do, you know how expensive, and heavy, it can be to satisfy that needful longing to add one more

rock to the collection by the water garden or get one more bag of cement to make another stone looking planter. Some stones have beautiful indentations that have held water throughout the centuries for animals and/or humans. Some, like Stonehenge, have been meeting places for peoples throughout the ages. Dinosaur feet may have crossed over some of them. But the beauty of stone is that it may just possess a fascinating texture and shape to be considered a great addition to the right spot in the landscape. A concrete art form making its way back into the landscape art world is el trabejo rustico or faux bois. This Mexican folk art, popular in the 1920's and 30's, is the art of sculpting concrete into realistic wood looking furniture, bridges, and other great garden pieces. Large collections of original work can be found in Michigan, Arkansas, Texas, and Chicago. And surprise, there are some interesting remnant bridge pieces in Fontana. Consider adding an historic, or even new, stone piece to your garden. In the stone lover's yard, the history may not be as important as the fact that it is just there, being a gorgeous hunk of rock in the perfect garden spot. View it in the same light as you would the topping on a great sundae.

Don't discount the obvious gardener's choice - plants are very artsy. Scale, movement, proportion, vertical and horizontal elements, the play of shadow and light - all are artistic elements that can be satisfied through proper choice and placement of living plant materials. Fences constructed from living willow or vines can be true dynamic sculptures. In the northern climates, the trunks and limbs of trees, shrubs and woody perennials become new winter sculptures every time it snows or ices over. Pruned limbs can be piled and shaped into hobbit house vine topiaries.

Beautiful original artwork is available everywhere. Thank goodness the human spirit will not be denied its outlets for creativity. When choosing artwork for the garden, keep in mind that the outdoor elements will do a number on lots of supposedly durable materials. That should not discourage a purchase, just be sure that the artist understands that it is intended for outdoor display. They may have some suggestions for keeping the artwork looking topnotch while maintaining its value. Antique pieces are great for outdoor display – if they are high value, consider moveable displays to minimize damage. Use them for special events and then store them out of the elements. Always make sure that your display bases and art pieces are secured properly to avoid breakage of either the work or a garden visitor. And remember that whatever you display – it should look right and necessary to the position of placement. If positioning a work of art to function at a polar end of the emotional spectrum – whether an exclamation of energy or a sigh of complete harmony - be sure that the piece or pieces are up to the task.