

Learning to plant by the numbers

By Liz Douville

For WesCom News Service

Understanding numbers usually applies to the high finance world of Wall Street or maybe just our checkbook. We seldom think of numbers in relationship to landscape. The numbers may be the eye appeal that is worthy of second glances from passersby.

The standard rule of thumb has always been planting in threes and fives. Maybe there are ways to successfully incorporate other numbers. Understanding the numbers and how to use them can give you confidence. It gives you the freedom to fudge that long-standing rule and satisfy your own taste in design.

• One plant can be either a specimen plant or a unifying plant. I planted blue lyme grass in front of a giant boulder and close to a blue spruce. The grass has a blu-

ish tint that echoes the blue of the blue spruce. In this case it acts as a specimen plant and a unifier.

• Two plants signal formality, and are usually used to mark both sides of an entrance or passageway. Formality is not my style. I would feel like I am being watched, checking I always walk a straight line.

• Three plants are a charm as long as they aren't used in a straight row like soldiers at attention. That would be dull. If you have enough space, group them in an equilateral triangle. This arrangement looks particularly good with mounding or vertical plants. Be sure to leave space between plants, especially if there are three different kinds. Another arrangement could use two plants with a garden ornament or a birdbath to count as the third item in the set

of three.

• Four plants can be divided in various ways. Avoid planting two and two on the sides of an entry. That planting often feels off-kilter, always calling for more, making it three and three.

You could plant one plant in each quadrant of a circle or square, either planting four distinct specimens or repeating the same plant. A planting that also works well would be dividing the four plants into three plants plus one. Position three plants on one side of a path and one on the other. This planting could be especially effective if an evergreen is used as the one plant because of its strong visual weight.

• Five is the number most often used. A classic example of 5 is to set up two parallel rows with three in one row and two in the other. This works best in a rectangular

bed. Positioning two plants on one side of a path and three on the other does not work but having four plants balanced with the fifth plant separate feels right.

• Six is two sets of three. This works best when broken into two groups. Either duplicate the arrangement of threes in a staggered row or in a triangle or position them to fill a corner. Dividing into groups of two, or a line of six, doesn't command much attention.

Now, let the fun begin by drawing out the six possibilities. Roughly sketch out either a straight or meandering path, whichever best suits your landscape. Just use circles to indicate your plantings and let your eyes lead you to a planting that best suits your personality.

When you are working on a plan near an entryway, avoid the following five plant

traits:

• Plants that have thorns that can snag clothes and skin.

• Plants that attract bees. Many plants attract a few bees, but try to keep bee magnet plants several feet away from your walkway or patio where you won't brush against them.

• Plants that sprawl. Plants that spread and sprawl should be planted far enough from a sidewalk that they don't fall into your path and present a tripping hazard.

• Plants that have branches at face height. Either prune branches high enough to be out of the way, or keep these plants far enough back that at their mature size they won't hang out over the path. I had to do some pruning on an apple tree after I observed the lawn service man having to duck under

the branches to mow.

• Plants that outgrow their space too quickly. If you need to prune a shrub severely every year to keep it within bounds, take it out and replant with a different variety.

HUNGARY

Continued from Page 1B

You can put anything you want in palacsinta, from ice cream to strawberries that have marinated for an hour or two in balsamic vinegar (the result is mostly sweet, not tart). One colleague whose grandmother was Hungarian said her family used to just sprinkle granulated sugar on them before rolling them up.

I decided to make a traditional sweet cheese filling. If there is a name for it, I do not know it and haven't been able to find it. You begin with ricotta cheese, though some people use dry cottage cheese, and mix in an egg yolk, some sugar, a couple of drops of vanilla and some lemon zest.

This concoction, whatever it may be called, is simply astounding. It is better than it sounds. It is better than I thought it would be. It is so good, I decided to try some on an English muffin, too.

Not a good idea. Stick to palacsinta. And if you do make palacsinta, be sure to use this sweet cheese filling in at least some of them.

For my other fillings, I made a chocolate ganache — chocolate melted into cream — which goes well with everything and especially

with crepes. I also had some homemade strawberry jam in my fridge, so I used that in some others, and I bought apricot jam and used that too, mixed with walnuts as is often done in Hungary.

Finally, I tried to re-create a filling that I read about, sour cream with rum raisins. I didn't have time to allow the raisins to get plump in the rum, so I just mixed raisins and a little rum in sour cream and added ground walnuts, a bit of vanilla and more sugar than I thought I was going to need.

It was a little tangy, a little sweet and entirely delicious with palacsinta. But it still wasn't as good as that sweet cheese filling.

PALACSINTA

Yield: 3 to 4 servings (3 pancakes per serving)

3 eggs

1 teaspoon superfine sugar, see note

Pinch of salt

1 cup milk

Generous 1 cup all-purpose flour

1 cup carbonated water

Butter, for the pan

Note: To make superfine sugar, blend granulated sugar

on high in a blender for several seconds until powdery.

1. Combine the eggs, sugar, salt and milk. Stir in the flour to form a smooth batter. Refrigerate at least 2 hours or overnight.

2. Just before cooking, stir in carbonated water. Put a skillet over medium heat and add just enough butter to coat it when it melts. Swirl the butter to coat. When hot, pour ½ ladle of batter into the skillet. Tilt the pan so the batter coats the surface of the pan evenly. When golden, flip the pancake to cook the other side.

3. Fill with sweetened cheese filling, below, jam (or jam with sweetened cheese filling), chocolate sauce, berries, strawberries marinated 1 to 2 hours in balsamic vinegar, or just sprinkle with granulated sugar.

Per serving: 318 calories; 9 g fat; 4 g saturated fat; 198 mg cholesterol; 13 g protein; 45 g carbohydrate; 13 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 892 mg sodium; 136 mg calcium

— Adapted from "The World Atlas of Street Food," by Carol Wilson and Sue Quinn

SWEETENED CHEESE FILLING

Yield: 3 servings

1 egg yolk, see note

1 tablespoon superfine sugar, see note

A few drops of vanilla extract

2/3 cup ricotta or cottage cheese

Grated zest of ½ lemon

Note: This recipe uses raw egg. The USDA warns that no one should eat raw eggs, unless the eggs have been pasteurized in their shells. Infants, young children, older adults, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are particularly at risk for foodborne illnesses.

To make superfine sugar, blend granulated sugar in blender on high for a few seconds until powdery.

1. Beat the yolk with the sugar and vanilla until creamy. In a separate bowl, soften the ricotta cheese with a large spoon or fork, then beat in the egg mixture and add the lemon zest.

2. Use to fill palacsinta or other crepes. If desired, mix with jam to fill palacsinta.

Per serving: 134 calories; 9 g fat; 5 g saturated fat; 90 mg cholesterol; 7 g protein; 6 g carbohydrate; 5 g sugar; 0 g

SYCAMORE

Continued from Page 1B

The white hue is especially distinct when it in is early dark, or in winter. Sycamores are very attractive reflected in ponds.

• The London Plane Tree (*Platanus acerifolia*): is not native and does not grow as large. Allow for 70 to 90 feet of height and 55 to 70 feet of spread. The London Plane tree has a trunk, white clear to the ground, mottled with blue-gray and light green. Except for leaf shape and trunk color (with closer examination) passers-by would not notice the difference between the kinds of trees.

There is another sycamore which is not native to our area and does not

seem to be as hardy. It may survive but it would not thrive. It is the California sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), It grows in canyons around San Diego. I took one of them to Missouri when I lived there. It didn't thrive there. Perhaps, in hind-sight, it was the heat which stressed and killed the tree, and not the cold.

• California sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*) trunk is white clear to the ground. Instead of a single seed ball, it has seed balls strung together like a string of beads; it can have 7 or 8 balls on the string. The leaves are large, have three lobes like a chicken foot, and the undersides are as soft as flannel.

All the sycamores have at least some fuzz on the undersides of their leaves.

The leaves are large and easy to rake, but take care putting them through a leaf-shredder as the fuzz can cause allergies if you breathe it in.

All the trees you plant can't really be considered "established" for at least two years. For the first two summers, they need supplemental watering. When you water trees, water deeply to avoid stimulating the growth of surface roots. If you make them live with only the water from watering your lawn, surface roots will grow and make mowing difficult as the roots enlarge over time.

Enjoy the spring weather and flowers, I will list yard-work chores next week.

If you have garden comments or questions, please write: greengarden-column@yahoo.com Thanks for reading!

DORY

Continued from Page 1B

I do agree that we need to revert to one time frame, but I would vote against Senate Bill 320 for the simple reason that it would eliminate a public vote, a small taste of dictatorship.

As I said earlier, we sometimes fight the hardest over the least important things and this is probably one of

them.

My thanks to the Oregon Senate for undertaking this issue, for it certainly has outworn its initial attempt to control energy costs, according to the Gazette Times editorial, and has been a thorn for most of us over many years. The matter does need to be resolved one way or another.

And, in a smattering of other things, following up on the discussion of La Grande's

Quiet Zone in banishing railroad train noises (Dick Mason article of April 10), I've said before that I liked the train steam whistles because I grew up with them and the lumber mill's 6:50 a.m. and 7 a.m. whistles.

Notice that I said "steam whistles" not "air horns." Then, too, there were passengers on those trains and not just freight, making us feel closer to the human element

part of it.

That brings up the subject of noise in general and I'll have a column coming up in the near future considering that.

Now it's spring rains and 20-year snowmelt floods. Yes, that many years ago I, too, was sandbagging on Mill Canyon Creek.

And, then came the spring flowers and all was right again with the world.

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