



BURY THE EVIDENCE (or Finding the Right Path)

by Carol Brinkman, HCMG

Saturday newspapers are my favorite. I anticipate the Saturday San Antonio Express News and Austin American Statesman all week long; and with coffee cup at hand, I go straight for the gardening sections. Calvin Finch, Neil Sperry, Skip Richter and assorted other garden writers seem especially attuned to my needs.

Last fall I began two major landscape projects, and the information provided by these experts has proven to be invaluable. I saved the gardening sections, and used the rest of the paper to put down over the area of St. Augustine grass that was to become an expanded border bed. The 8 to 10 thickness of papers was topped with 4 to 6 inches of compost. When the paper had disintegrated, the dead grass was removed, the soil was turned and amended — all as instructed in an article I read.

Another project was a flowerbed specifically for my intended iris collection. Once again, the gardening advice found in the newspaper proved useful. According to what I read, it is now fashionable to plant vegetables and herbs among the perennials. This proved to be the perfect solution for a large iris bed and a small iris collection. My ten new iris are doing well, and we have eaten beets, Brussels sprouts, and Mesclun greens all winter and had some to share, too.

The next step in my project is to decide what kind of pathway I should use around and through the two new beds. Through further reading, I have learned more about the basic principles of designing garden pathways:

1) Determine the function of the pathway. Do you need access to beds with tools and wheelbarrow? Then a more utilitarian, firm path is called for. Is the pathway for leisurely stroll as you and your guests admire your efforts and nature's beauty? If so, an important thing to remember here is that the path should be a minimum of 48 inches wide so that two people can walk comfortably side by side.

2) Identify your style. The surface you choose should reflect the style of your landscape. Is your garden formal, informal, or somewhere in between? A formal garden path would have straight lines and hard surfaces such as a brick laid in a herringbone pattern. Natural materials are more suitable for the informal garden. A gravel path, randomly placed stones, or a chipped wood surface would be more fitting in a cottage garden or the garden that features native plants or cacti/ succulents.

3) Keep your pathway in proportion or scale. An expansive garden area calls for a broader path with sweeping curves that would overwhelm a smaller garden. A smaller garden is usually a more intimate space and the scale should reflect this.

4) Dare to be different; express yourself! Just this morning in the Statesman, Renee Studebaker suggested gardeners should "have some fun and experience your inner artist." Studebaker's suggestion is to plant wine bottles upside down in the ground side by side. I think her idea will make a great pathway among the iris. I have wine bottles, but I'm not saying how long this pathway will be eventually.



California poppies line the path as "filler" in the new iris bed