

# ATTENTION GETTERS

**When designing both interiors and exteriors, I like to place items that I call “attention getters.” These are items – maybe accessories, maybe art or maybe a specimen plant – that capture someone’s interest and emotionally drive excitement. These points of emphasis are the things that your guests will remember.**

**Story and photos by Chris Olsen**



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ou only need a few if not just one focal point to do the trick. Be careful, you don't want a visual overload. There is a point when too much is just that, too much. The Japanese live according to this principle. A Japanese garden has just a few attention getters. It can be a unique boulder with character. It may be a red pergola or a bamboo fence. The goal is to keep it simple. Simplicity is very hard for most of us. You know what I mean! We all have someone in our neighborhood who has gone too far and has a collection of garden accessories that looks, well, like a junkyard. I don't care how beautiful their house may be, if they have a collection of 60 gnomes in the front yard ... well ... it's time to get a gun and go target practicing, or in extreme cases, move.

So it is our job to have self control and design or find those creative focal points that will complement your landscape and be visually pleasing to the eye.

The good news is that I am here to help. I have a few ideas that have worked for me and may just make your home and garden the envy of your neighborhood. Let's start with easy, affordable focal points for little cash since most of us live on a budget.

Planted containers can be such wonderful points of emphasis. The container itself can be all you need, but overflowing with different blooming plants with contrasting textures and colors will only help intensify the experience. The placement is equally important. Raised on a pedestal slap dab in the middle of a flower bed can be quite dramatic.

I have an easy pedestal that you can build yourself. All you need are the following supplies:

- Four 6 x 6-inch treated timbers
- One 2 x 4-inch 8-foot treated board
- Wood screws in tan color
- Drill
- A little time and patience
- An assistant

Just make your pedestal first and then plant it in the ground. All you have to do is take the 6 x 6-inch timbers and cut to desired size. Re-



△ Oversized fiberglass bowls atop pedestals are overflowing with an assortment of tropicals and are ready for the spring and summer months ahead.

Left: A hole in the center of the pedestal allows for drip irrigation that will enter the pot through the bottom.

Opposite page: Make your front utility areas, such as this storm drain, a pleasing focal point. A grouping of pots planted with assorted perennial greenery exploding with copper piping is not only great looking and fun, but a passerby would never notice the storm drain below.

member that you will need about 18 inches buried in the ground for stability. You can concrete the pedestal into place if you like. Then connect the top and bottom of the exposed pedestal with pieces of the 2 x 4 inch board (see photo). This will leave you with space between the 6 x 6 inch timbers. This creates a nice bold pedestal. I also drilled a hole in the center of the pedestal for drip irrigation that will enter the pot through the bottom. If you like, you can paint your pedestal a vibrant color. A Spanish blue is awesome! The final detail is to place a large bowl-shaped container on top of the pedestal and plant it with whatever your heart desires. A grouping of three pedestals at different heights can be very impressive.

Even an oversized container planted in the garden can be beautiful. The larger the size the better. You want it to look like it is a permanent addition to your landscape. Make sure you use material that is weather- and cold-resistant. Terra-cotta will absorb moisture from the earth and will crack during cold weather. Quality glazed containers or concrete pots should last for years to come. But, as I always say, there are no 100 percent guarantees and nothing lasts forever. Here is a secret – when you place a potted container in the garden, make sure you install about 4 inches of gravel underneath the pot. This will help prevent moisture problems in the winter and will allow your pot to drain for years to come. Trust me ... I am talking from experience.

You can plant your oversized container with a few perennial evergreens and then “spice it up” with seasonal color for pizzazz. Make sure you blend together different plants for impact. Each season, add something new for freshness.

Even a cluster of potted containers sitting on a curbside sewer can become an “attention getter” and draw your attention from the ugly sewer to beautiful pots cascading with wonderful plants.

What if you want to create a new sitting area, but you really want it to be different and stand out? Create an intimate outdoor room by making a wall of lanterns as your backdrop. Say what? You read it correctly, a wall of lanterns! Find that perfect area in your yard that would work best for a small patio, then build your lantern structure. All you have to do is concrete into the ground two 10-foot 6 x 6-inch timbers. Then connect the two timbers together with two copper poles. The copper poles will tarnish within only a few weeks. Now hang an assortment of different weatherproof lanterns. I went ahead and wired each lantern with LED lights. Now it is my attention getter, not only during the day, but at night as well. To age the structure, I planted an assortment of vines – Lady Banks rose and evergreen clematis. The structure is painted the color of bark so it blends into the landscape. It is subtle, but stands out 24 hours a day.

Any type of patio in front of the lanterns will work. We installed a circular design of cut stone to contrast the angles of the structure. Of course, you have to have bright, colorful chairs and a fire pit to complete the outdoor room. Just sit back, make a smore and sip on a glass of red wine. Oh, how I wish I was there now ...

**Create your own restful retreat as well as a wonderful focal point in the garden. Assorted lanterns hanging from copper pipes add a visual element that still allows you to still see the views of the garden beyond. Colorful chairs make the perfect place for an evening drink and perhaps a snack or two.▷**

**Simply gorgeous....Oversized pots bursting with Bubblegum petunias and a little of this and some of that are definitely “attention getters.” If you fertilize with any all-purpose fertilizer, your pots can look like this. Just a little attention will bring forth huge results.▽**



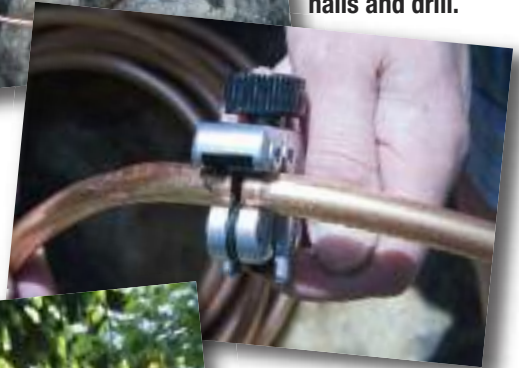
LET YOUR IMAGINATION  
YOUR GARDEN WILL BE COMPLEMENTED



GO FREE AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT,  
WITH GREAT ATTENTION GETTERS.



◁ To spruce up your gate into a focal point, you will need 1/4-inch copper tubing, a metal pipe cutter, hammer, nails and drill.



△ Cut several different lengths from tubing using the pipe cutter. File the end of tubing to reduce sharpness.



◁ Using a hammer, tap the end of a piece of copper to flatten it a bit and nail to fence. Bend and mold tubing as desired then nail other end to the fence.

The simplest of details can make a dreary wooden gate come alive and fun. Just take copper refrigerator piping that you can find at your local hardware store, cut and nail to your wooden gate. Be creative and twirl the piping in any shape you want. Small 1/2 inch nails are all you need. I cut each section into about 3 to 4 foot lengths. Word of caution, copper is a treasured item to thieves, so a protected area is preferred.

So there you have it, just a few rather easy ways to make your home and garden stand out (in a good way) in your neighborhood. Give some if not all of these projects a try. Let your imagination go wild and before you know it, your garden will be complemented with great attention getters. 🌿

*Chris Olsen is the owner and landscape designer of Botanica Gardens in Little Rock. For more information on Chris go to [chrisholsen.com](http://chrisholsen.com).*