

PERGOLA OR ARBOR?

Long before Disney entered the scene, Florida was host to more than 100 roadside attractions that sought to pique the curiosity of vacationers seeking oddities as well as the unfamiliar and exotic. We're all familiar with Florida's "original" attraction which started in 1878 with Hullum Jones' glass bottom boats – Silver Springs. It is one of the few of those original attractions that remain. One of my favorites is Sunken Gardens. Family-run for more than four generations, it started when George Turner – a plumber by trade and great-great-grandfather of a Villages employee, bought a parcel of land with a two acre lake. He drained the lake, which was 10 feet below sea level, and in the early 1900s, began planting papaya plants.

His green thumb, as well as the fertile soil of the lake bottom, worked wonders and Mr. Turner began to plant all sorts of exotica. In the 1920s, as a neighboring church let out, he would invite the worshipers to visit for a nickel. The City of St. Petersburg purchased the attraction in 1999, and it is well worth a visit. And if you do go, you'll see the "growing stone," a large limestone outcropping where legend has it that if you sit on the stone, you will also develop a green thumb. Just to the south of the growing stone is the Orchid Arbor, where you can see just what a green thumb can produce.

When asked where the Orchid Pergola is, a Sunken Gardens attendant corrected me with official certitude, "Oh, that's not a pergola, it's our Orchid Arbor." In The Villages, however, such certitude has been fugitive as there has been some recent differing opinions regarding what constitutes a pergola, an arbor or an arch, and whether one is permitted, and, if permitted, how one must be erected.

To dispel any controversy, the architectural review committee undertook to define and describe each structure, and then to determine its proper placement. The architectural



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review committee has settled upon what they hope are workable definitions and guidelines.

This seemingly straightforward task was complicated by differing reference source information. The references they consulted are not all that straight forward in that some dictionaries list the words as synonyms, while others draw a distinction, defining one, for example as having an arch and another as being large enough to grow small gardens beneath. Further, the various references that did distinguish, didn't even agree on the distinctions. For the purposes of The Villages and the ARC, we are using the following simple definitions.

If the structure is wide and attached to the home, the ARC will consider it a pergola. It should not occupy an easement or setback, and it must be behind the front elevation and the top beams should be no closer together than 10 inches apart. The structure may be made of wood or vinyl. You must submit an application to the architectural review committee and obtain approval before commencing construction on a pergola.

If the structure is freestanding, the ARC will consider it an arbor or arch. In the past, it was required that an arbor or arch be attached to the house, that it not be freestanding. But over the years, when homeowners tried to comply with that provision, the results frequently ranged between weird and ridiculous.

To prevent these results, they set out to define how the arbor should be attached. In so doing, they reexamined the need for such a requirement and eventually determined there really wasn't one. Arbors are classically freestanding and many folks love the way they

look in a lawn adorned with climbing vines, some distance from the home. There is a limit of one arbor per home site, and it must be placed to the side or rear of the home. Also, for the sake of uniformity and aesthetics, the arbor is to fall within the following dimensions:

- Width: not greater than 48 inches
- Depth: not greater than 28 inches
- Height: not greater than the eave of your home.

These dimensions allow you to select from many available styles at the various local home improvement stores, while at the same time preventing the erection of huge, overwhelming structures or ones with fences and/or attachments to the side.

Owners of courtyard villas may have an arbor in back or to the side of the home. Owners of patio villas may also have an arbor, but it should be placed in the rear and not to the side due to the ban on vertical structures which would encroach upon the property line.

There, now you have it in writing. I hope this clarifies matters and that you will feel comfortable enhancing your landscaping with an arbor or pergola – don't forget to put in an application.

Last November, I reported on the "adopt-a-bench" program and told you I'd let you know when we had 100. We are at 98 with two in the wings. The program is meaningful and utilitarian, and the benches enhance many of our public roadways and areas surrounding water retention ponds. If you see one, you are welcome to stop and sit a bit and read the plaque on it.

Thanks for meeting me here, and I'll see you here again in a couple of weeks. In the meantime, please check out our district Web site – there is a veritable plethora of useful information on it at districtgov.org. See you soon.

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