



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

All photography by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis

Substitution No-Nos

During the installation of a landscape using a landscape plan, substitution of plants without proper research is like ignoring a doctor's prescription for a medication and selecting a different one based on the packaging. Either scenario could lead to disaster, but at least in the landscape it typically isn't life threatening. However, it could easily lead to a waste of money and an incongruous-looking garden. Whether the landscape is self-installed or contractor installed, here are some tips to follow.

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR INSTALLED: the substitution of plants may be under the purview of a landscape contractor. Use of the wrong plants may happen inadvertently if they are unfamiliar with them. Since many designs require a variety of plants, many nurseries are needed to provide them. Typically, the contractor obtains the plants for a project through a re-wholesaler who collects the plants from numerous nurseries. Too often the re-wholesalers obtain some wrong plants and an unknowledgeable contractor accepts and plants them. The best protection is to have the final installation inspected by the landscape architect/designer.

HOMEOWNER INSTALLED: make note of the botanic names noted by its genus, species, and perhaps cultivar. For example, one type of magnolia is *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem' which has smaller leaves and stature than many other magnolias which grow into much larger trees.

If different plants must be used - typically due to lack of availability - contact the designer for suggestions. If that is not an option, do thorough research to make sure the replacement plant will fill the requirements dictated by the site conditions (light levels, soils, and space) and the design.

When at a nursery and the desired plant is not available but another one has a similar botanical name, be cautious - that doesn't mean all related plants perform the same. Often, they grow in different conditions and may even be native to different continents. Their foliage, blossoms, and ultimate heights and spreads may be different, so they look totally unrelated.

PLANTS WE HAVE SEEN WRONGLY SUBSTITUTED:

- *Allamanda cathartica* - (allamanda) a vine versus *Allamanda schottii* - (shrub allamanda) a shrub
- *Bauhinia blakeana* (orchid tree) - 20' tall, purple blooms versus *Bauhinia galpinii/punctata* - 8-10' tall, red blooms
- *Camellia hiemalis* 'Shishigashira' - 4' to 5' tall versus *Camellia* species - 6-20' plus
- *Loropetalum* 'Ruby' - 4-6' tall versus *Loropetalum* 'Shang-lo'/'Peack' - 18" tall
- *Muhlenbergia capillaris* (muhly grass) - native, 2-3' tall, pink blooms versus *Muhlenbergia dumosa* (bamboo muhly) - non-native, 6' tall, nondescript blooms
- *Nandina domestica* (heavenly bamboo) - 6-8' tall versus *Nandina domestica* 'Flirt' (dwarf heavenly bamboo) - 12-18" tall
- *Ophiopogon japonicus* (mondo grass) - 5-7" tall versus *Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Dwarf' (dwarf mondo grass) - 2" tall
- *Podocarpus macrophyllus* (yew podocarpus) - hedge to 20' plus tall versus *Podocarpus macrophyllus* 'Pringles' (dwarf yew podocarpus) - 3-5' tall
- *Viburnum odoratissimum* (sweet viburnum) - non-native, 30' tall, large leaves, and can freeze versus *Viburnum obovatum* 'Mrs. Schiller's Delight' (dwarf Walter's viburnum) - native, 4' tall, small leaves and cold-hardy
- *Zamia furfuracea/maritima* (cardboard plant) - 8' wide with wide leaflets versus *Zamia pumila* (coontie) - 4' wide with narrow leaflets

To get the best value from a new landscape make sure the proper plants are used, otherwise there could be unpleasant surprises.



Zamia furfuracea - cardboard plant



Zamia pumila - coontie



Viburnum odoratissimum - sweet viburnum



Viburnum obovatum 'Mrs. Schiller's Delight' - dwarf Walter's viburnum



Allamanda cathartica - allamanda



Allamanda schottii - shrub allamanda