

Center Island Design By: Luis Llenza

Many Florida homes feature a circle drive with a center island in the front of the house. To illustrate how landscape design can transform this common yard feature into a dramatic and inviting entrance, we'd like to share a completed project. As you can see from the before photo, the existing island did little to dress up the house front. Two Queen Palms, a lamppost and a carpet of high-maintenance turf, while functional, lacked curb appeal.



With little elevation, flooding was a problem during heavy rains. The client wanted a lush tropical garden that would enhance the front yard area and provide a privacy and noise screen. To conserve water, he specified the use of drought tolerant native plants and the elimination of all grass. He also asked us to install new outdoor lighting for added drama after dark.

After removing the palms and light post, we added three yards of topsoil and a mixture of multi-colored river rock, and then we graded the mound to slope gently toward the street. This new elevation will create visual interest and address the drainage problem.

We chose a *Tabebuia argentea* tree, known for its plentiful yellow flowers in early spring, to anchor our asymmetrical design. Next to this tree, we placed three *Phoenix roebelenii* palms of varying heights to create a bushy under story. Beneath the palm canopy, we used several varieties of *Sansevieria trifasciata* to achieve vertical architectural interest. This ever-hardy perennial, also called snake plant or mother-in-law's tongue, has stiff, wavy erect leaves that are one-to-three feet long.

Next, we planted a collection of agaves, including the yellow and green *Agave Americana* 'Variegata', silver *Agave angustifolia* and the whisker-like *Agave geminiflora* specimens. Using succulent *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* 'Silver Plate' and green- and purple-leafed *Rhoeo* plants, we created a wavy path of texture and color across the garden. Amid the river rock plateaus, we placed an assortment of accent plants, including Pony Tail and *Jatropha*. Further highlighting these specimens are black Mexican pebbles which encircle the base of each plant. To complete the composition and define the edge of the garden, we planted a textured green border of *Star Sedum*. For accent lighting, we chose up lights for the *Phoenix roebelenii* and *Tabebuia argentea* and backlights for display behind the *Sansevieria trifasciata*. The shadows cast by this nightscape lighting add a theatrical dimension to the garden. Day or night, this once ordinary island has been transformed into an inviting oasis that now showcases the home's entrance and drive.

