# Borders and Other Things at the Edge

**Borders delineate much more than where a path starts and beddings begin. Depending on the kind, borders can also be gardens in themselves.**

Something lives at the edge. Something intriguing. It hovers just on the brink of knowing, of having, but it’s never quite caught. Never quite understood. But this is what we like about things on the edge, whether it’s people who toe the line or ideas that are just tipping the scale. Edges suggest something a little more wilder than the norm.

It’s this way with gardens, too. Borders delineate much more than where a path starts and beddings begin. They hint at that transitional place that takes the imagination as well as the eye to other places. And depending on the kind, borders can also be gardens in themselves.

Simply put, a border defines a perimeter or an edge to an established planted area. Borders can either be plants themselves or firmer structures like metal, bamboo, stone or brick. It’s the choice of a garden border that will also help characterize the type of garden you have.

For instance, if you want a low edge, bamboo fencing will give a different feel to a place than will a raised brick wall—even if both are the same height.

Wrought iron borders come in small 8-12 inch sections, which make it easy to design a pattern within a garden area. For marking out places with larger, bolder frames there are a number of nice open iron panels, too.

One idea for softening concrete walkways is arranging groups of potted plants and container gardens in such a way that the straightness is altered to a meandering lane. Another method is planting a collection of penstemons, [agastaches](http://www.highcountrygardens.com/agastache.html), dianthuses, artemisas, sage and salvias. These are plants that Lauren Springer, author of “Passionate Gardening” and “The Undaunted Garden,” used in one of her pre-planned gardens, the Inferno Strip Garden. These plants eventually spread and spilled over and hid the severe edge of the concrete sidewalk and the curb.

Edges can be straight or curved, and if you’re planting the border it can be orderly and trimmed or a bit wild and frothy. For that more controlled look try some portulaca, creeping zinnias, and a band of gazanias. Others might be dwarf plumbago and yerba mansa.

Some different small plants for borders are lettuce, parsley, basil and thyme. All of these can be become a fun way to orchestrate an edible eclectic edge.

When using plants as borders, think of them as planting beds with backgrounds. But no matter what you use to delineate one area from another, it guides the eye or the walker. It’s the edges that lead us on. They take us to the very verge, hinting of other things. Even if a border is intended to control, it makes you wonder what is trying to get out of being restrained. It’s an exciting garden that can stir a hidden response.