

Notes from a Small Garden

OPTIONS

- Needs – to be a success, the design of the garden must suit the needs of all who will be using it. Children need a place to run and play; maybe a sand box or jungle gym; storage for bikes and toys. Adults may prefer a quiet place to sit; an area for entertaining; a barbeque. The keen gardener may have a tough decision when it comes time to choosing room for plants or a dining area.
- Site Assessment – Look at what you have; what kind of soil do you have; consider your lifestyle; gather ideas; take note of exposure, winds, good and bad views and existing features; draw a plan.

CHOOSING A STYLE

- Inspiration – may come from visiting other gardens; seasonal home and garden shows; flower shows; television; gardening magazines.
- Themes – formal; informal; cottage garden; Japanese; Knot garden; shade garden

SUITING A LIFESTYLE

- Low Maintenance – use of paving cuts down on lawn upkeep; try to find a balance between hard surfacing and soft plantings; borders of annuals and perennials need time and effort while groupings of shrubs need less.
- Outdoor Life – entertaining; dining; lighting for function and effect; seating areas.
- Family Needs – consider the changing needs of children as they grow older; playing surfaces may need to change over time; have a special “patch” for children interested in plants.
- Safety and Play – have lid for the sandbox to help it stay clean; use soft bark for play areas; no toxic or spiny plants; safe water features.
- Ponds, Pools and Fountains – K.I.S.S. (Keep it simple and safe) and clean; use containers instead of a pond or pool; install a heavy-duty grille just below the surface if children have access; consider wall spouts as an option.
- Raised Beds – adds an interesting change in level to a flat site; creates separate planting areas; aids gardeners with bad backs or those who have trouble bending.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

- Areas of Transition – most designs start from the house with a mix of plantings and paving making the all-important link; moving from the house the design becomes “softer”; plantings are used to enclose the garden or frame attractive views; in a garden with different areas or “rooms” consider how best to move between each; what draws you onward?
- Pattern and Line – inspiration may not always come from looking at other gardens; try non-garden sources such as fabric, carpet or wall paper patterns, paintings, sculpture or jewelry; formal patterns such as those for a Knot garden should be laid out on the ground accurately; informal designs can be laid out with a hose and some spray paint.

ILLUSIONS OF SPACE

- Diversionary tactics – a major part of garden design is to create the illusion of greater space, either by fooling the eye or by leading it on from one area to another; dividing a space introduces the elements of mystery and surprise suggesting that what is out of view is worth exploring. If a garden is long and narrow, the eye may be drawn straight to the back boundary but dividing the length with screens or plantings will divert your gaze. Weatherproof mirrors placed around the garden give the appearance of greater depth, reflect more light and help to trick the eye.
- Garden rooms – another way to disguise length is by creating different rooms and connecting them with “doorways” using pergolas, gates or archways; Different rooms can contain different styles of garden; make it possible to put a plan into action in several stages.
- Working out the angles – in a rectangular or square site, you can make the space seem larger by swinging the axis around so that it lies at angle to the house. An angle of 45 degrees usually works best and is easy to use when cutting material like paving slabs or decking.

CREATING BOUNDARIES

- Care with colour – walls and fences can help to make the space seem smaller and the secret is to “lose” the boundary. Light-coloured fences or walls stand out and the best way is to use a darker paint or stain to help the boundary to recede and blend in with the landscape. Use black, dark browns and shades of blues and greens.
- Depth – a good deep shrub border, at least 3 feet deep, will help to conceal the boundary; if space is tight use climbers.
- Privacy – a cleverly designed trellis can help raise the height of the boundary in chosen places to screen unwanted views.
- Peek-a-Boos – cut outs in a hedge or a cleverly designed trellis can help to frame a desirable view.

GOLDEN RULES

- Keep the design simple
- Keep the variety of hardscape materials to a minimum
- Where paving material links the house to the garden, use material that match the house if possible
- Run out design lines and axes from the centre of doors and windows
- Consider how you will move from one area to another and whether features such as arches, water or sculpture would help to draw you on.
- Try to create a feeling of mystery and surprise.
- Make a choice between harmony and drama
- Right plant, right place.
- Use plantings to soften and enclose or to frame or focus attention on views outside the garden boundary.

The Small Garden Plant List

Small Trees

- *Acer ginnala* Amur Maple
- *Acer griseum* Paperbark Maple
- *Acer palmatum* Japanese Maple
- *Amelanchier laevis* Alleghany Serviceberry
- *Betula nigra* River Birch
- *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* Japanese Katsura
- *Cercis canadensis* Redbud
- *Chamaecyparis obtusa* Hinoki Cypress
- *Chionanthus virginicus* Fringe Tree
- *Cornus florida* Flowering Dogwood
- *Cornus kousa* Kousa Dogwood
- *Cornus mas* Cornelian Cherry
- *Cotinus coggygria* Smokebush
- *Hamamelis x intermedia* Witch Hazel
- *Juniperus virginiana* Eastern Red Cedar
- *Magnolia stellata* Star Magnolia
- *Malus floribunda* Crab Apple
- *Pinus bungeana* Lacebark Pine
- *Pinus mugho* Mugo Pine
- *Prunus x yedoensis* Yoshino Cherry
- *Prunus 'Amanogawa'* Amanogawa Cherry
- *Stewartia pseudocamellia* Japanese Stewartia
- *Syringa reticulata* Tree Lilac

Shrubs

- *Aronia arbutifolia* Chokeberry
- *Buxus sempervirens* Boxwood
- *Callicarpa Americana* Purple Beautyberry
- *Clethra alnifolia* Summersweet
- *Cornus stolonifera* Red-twigged Dogwood
- *Fothergilla major* Large Fothergilla
- *Forsythia x intermedia* Border Forsythia
- *Hydrangea paniculata* PG Hydrangea
- *Hydrangea quercifolia* Oakleaf Hydrangea
- *Ilex verticillata* Winterberry
- *Itea virginica* Sweetspire
- *Mahonia aquifolium* Orgeon Grape Holly
- *Spiraea x bumalda* Bumald Spiraea
- *Syringa vulgaris* Common lilac
- *Viburnum x burkwoodi* Burkwood Viburnum
- *Viburnum carlesii* Koreanspice Viburnum
- *Weigela florida* Old Fashioned Weigela

Vines - Woody

- *Actinidia kolomikta* Hardy Kiwi Vine
- *Campsis radicans* Trumpet vine
- *Clematis species* Clematis
- *Hydrangea anomala* Climbing Hydrangea
- *Lonicera sempervirens* Honeysuckle Vine
- *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* Virginia Creeper
- *Parthenocissus tricuspidata* Boston Ivy
- *Schizophragma hydrangeoides* Japanese Hydrangea Vine
- *Vitis vinifera* Ornamental Grapevine
- *Wisteria floribunda* Japanese Wisteria
- *Wisteria sinensis* Chinese Wisteria

Vines – Annual/Perennial

- *Asarina scandens* Climbing Snapdragon
- *Cobaea scandens* Cup and Saucer Vine
- *Dolichos lablab* Hyacinth Bean
- *Ipomoea tricolor* Morning Glory
- *Lathyrus odoratus* Sweet Pea
- *Tropaeolum majus* Climbing Nasturtium

Ground Cover

- *Ajuga reptans cultivars* Bugleweed
- *Alchemilla vulgaris* Lady's Mantle
- *Asarum canadense* Canadian Ginger
- *Bergenia purpurascens* Purple Bergenia
- *Brunnera macrophylla cvs* Perennial Forget-Me-Not
- *Dianthus x alwoodii* Cheddar Pink Carnation
- *Euonymus fortunei* Wintercreeper
- *Galium odoratum* Sweet Woodruff
- *Geranium macrorrhizum* Bigroot Geranium
- *Hedera colchica* Persian Ivy
- *Hedera helix cvs.* English Ivy
- *Heuchera species and cvs.* Coral Bells
- *Hosta species and cvs.* Hosta
- *Iberis sempervirens* Perennial Candytuft
- *Lamium maculatum* Spotted Dead Nettle
- *Liriope spicata* Lilyturf
- *Pachysandra terminalis* Pachysandra
- *Sedum species and cvs* Sedum
- *Thymus serpyllum* Creeping Thyme
- *Tiarella cordifolia* Heartleaf Foamflower
- *Vinca minor cv's* Creeping Myrtle
- *Adiantum; Athyrium spp.* Fern species and cultivars
- *Dryopteris; Polystichum spp.* Fern species and cultivars

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