

# Design tips to get you started

## 1. Elements of composition

There is a fantastic variety of shapes, colors and textures you can use to create your garden. Some people make powerful visual statements by limiting variety. For example a flower garden whose flowers are all white has a memorable impact. The effect is made even more exciting by using white flowers with a wide variety of sizes and textures.

Another approach is to create a strong contrast between two materials. A red-brick path running through a bed of evergreen gives a strong color contrast. Likewise red roses amidst an expanse of white alyssum creates a dramatic color contrast.

## 2. A place for people

Often gardeners create gardens that may be beautiful but don't allow room for people. Creating a sense of enclosure (one of definite boundaries) can encourage people to spend time in your garden instead of merely passing through.

Try moving your plant displays around a central-paved or grassy space and set benches into the edge bordering the planted area. If the space is large enough and is grassy, it could be used for children to play or make sports. Here you have given room for two types of people: the active ones who use the center area, and the passive onlookers who gravitate to the benches at the edge.

## 3. A garden which is a journey

Your property can become an experience that a person travels through with beginning and end, surprises, places to pause, looks that draw a person on, and a climax point. For example if your house is on a rocky hillside — the hill can be planted and a zigzag path can wind up the hill. Stone seats can be placed at points along the path with exceptional views. Here the climax of the journey is the front door of the house.

If you have more land to work with your path can lead through a densely-planted area meandering until it finally opens into an expansive clearing. Ideally you catch a glimpse of the clearing and lose sight of it again before finally reaching it.

## 4. Private places

People living in an urban environment are in the greatest need of a secluded sanctuary and ironically this is the most difficult place to create. Here are some ideas for turning limited amounts of space into private realms:

### 4a. A greenhouse

A greenhouse can be added onto the house itself. It can be treated almost like an outdoor garden. One idea is to combine potted plants and flowerbeds surrounding a bench that faces outdoors. This is an especially wonderful environment in winter, as one can enjoy the "almost outdoors" in comfort.

### 4b. Roof gardens

A roof should be a totally private place; however this potential is hardly ever realized. To grow perennials one only requires about 30 centimeters of soil. It is not difficult to create a sizeable flowerbed on a rooftop that can give it a rich and living atmosphere. Certain parts of a roof (those over a structural column) can even support the weight of a small tree. Keep the edges of the roof accessible to people, since they will naturally be drawn there to look down at the world below.

Note: Find out from an experienced architect exactly how much weight your particular roof can support!

### 4c. Trellises

In a crowded urban area where the next building is only meters away people often feel trapped in a world of stone and concrete. A small trellised overhead courtyard next to your house will eliminate the feeling of being trapped up. You can cover the trellis with vines, wild roses, or even potted annuals hanging from the structure. The next-door neighbors are still as close as they were but the effect is definitely softened.

In this article a mere sample of the countless design ideas have been presented. Don't hesitate to pile up more ideas from gardening books and experienced landscapers. The more possibilities you try, the more creative your end result will be and the more fun you'll have getting there.

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