

SMALL GARDENS

How to make the most of a small garden
and the 15 best plants to use



gardening*express*
for everyone's garden

"We grow thousands upon thousands of hardy plants right in or at our Essex nursery that spans in excess of 14 acres – that's a lot of plants!"



www.GardeningExpress.co.uk

Table of CONTENTS

03	Introduction
04 - 05	How to Create a Small Garden in 12 Easy Steps
06 - 08	Top 15 Plants for Small Gardens



Photo by Thierry Lemaitre

INTRODUCTION

Having a small garden doesn't mean you can't create a garden with impact!

These days, many of us live in crowded, urban areas and outdoor space is a precious commodity. Most town gardens are less than five metres square and many new build schemes leave little room for a 'decent' garden. Half of the population in modern cities live in flats with their outdoor space limited to a small balcony area. It's not all bad news, though, as space is no longer a barrier to being a gardener. With the right plants and design, any size space can become a garden. This guide will help you to create a beautiful garden in a small space, utilising some of the best plants for this task.

The small garden has an advantage as it can be entirely unique, a reflection of a person's character and the rest of their living space. At the same time, every plant in a small garden has to work hard to earn its place; this means long flowering periods and year-round interest.



How to create a small garden with a big personality

It's always good when starting a small garden to have a clean slate. Start by removing old features and unwanted plants, creating a blank canvas. Now look at the aspect: is it sunny, shady or windy? This can have an impact on how you use the space and what plants are best suited for it.

Measure the space. Where space is limited, consider how the garden will be primarily used. A table and chairs for morning coffee? Supplementing the kitchen? An area to sunbathe? Or, do you simply want to fill it with plants?

It is important to think of this small space as a cubic area. In other words, think about how you can utilise the vertical space in the garden. You can increase the size of your small outdoor space 3-fold by filling the cube with gardening artefacts and plants. If you have a balcony, are there any railings you can use? Are there walls that can be used for climbing plants? Can containers or frames be mounted on the walls? To bring out the full potential of a small garden, add some depth to it – a small garden is never flat.

HOW TO CREATE A SMALL GARDEN IN 12 EASY STEPS

1. Measure: Measure the space you have available and take a note of anything that has to remain in the garden, or ugly external elements that you would rather cover up, or distract from. Take a good look at your boundaries. In a small garden, the fence lines play a significant role in defining the look and feel of the garden.
2. Design: Think of design ideas and how you can maximise the space you have. In a small garden it is vital to identify the longest axis (from one corner to the opposite corner.) This can help to draw the eye across the garden, giving the impression of more space. Identify where you will sit in the garden and where to site key features. Consider your boundaries – do the fences work and can they be kept?
3. Theme: Consider having a theme or style for the space. The small garden – not unlike a bedroom or living room – can be a reflection of the resident's personality. Without deciding upon a style, it is easy to end up with a mismatched range of both objects and plants in the garden. Identify which plants you are putting in your garden and their position. Even if you are not a plant lover, browse our 'Best Plants for Small Gardens' guide below, for some inspiration: plants can help to create a cohesive garden style.

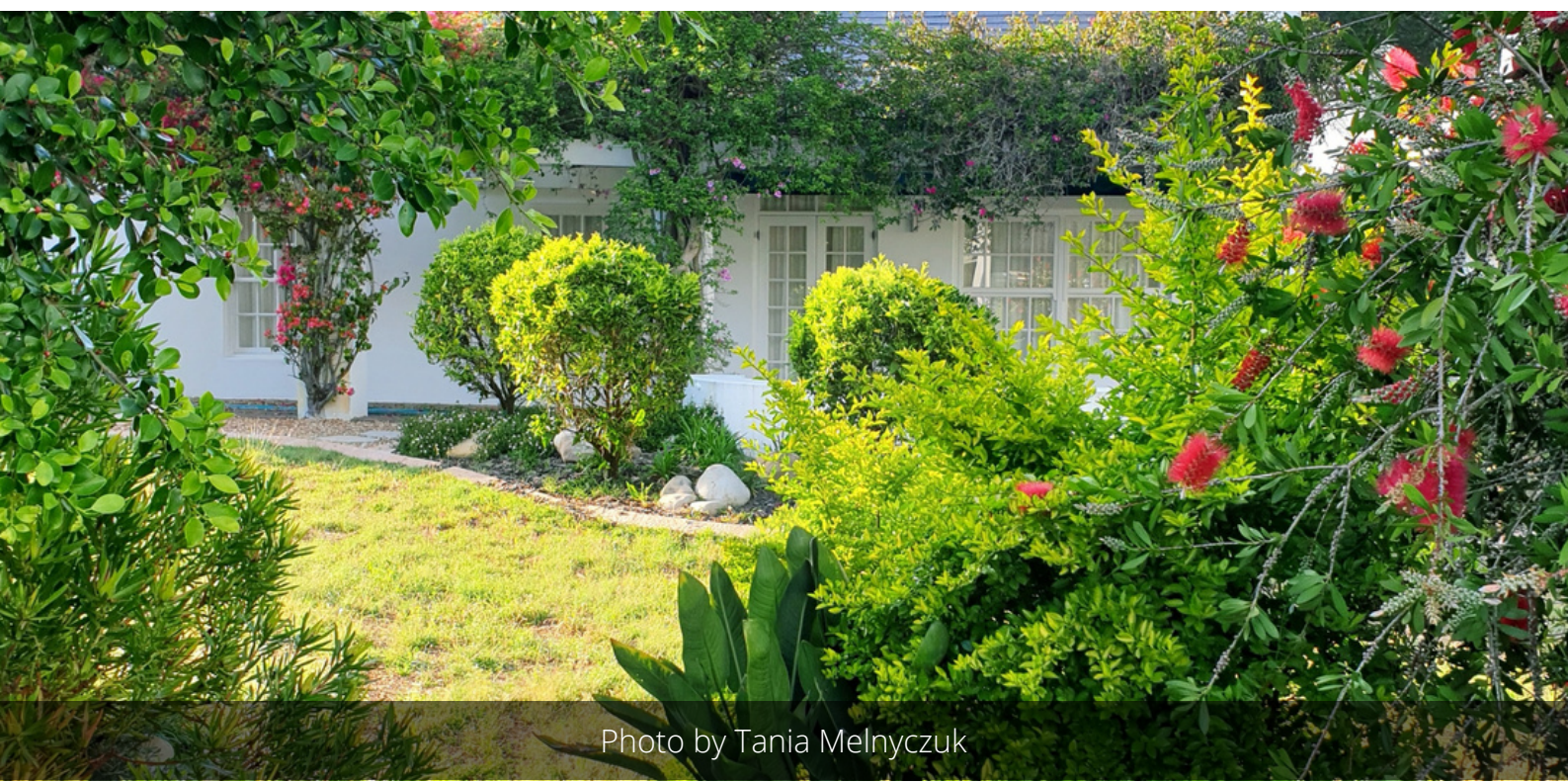


Photo by Tania Melnychuk

4. Use: It is crucial to consider what the primary use of the garden is going to be. With a smaller space, try not to overcrowd it. For example: it is unlikely that you will be able to fit in a large seating area, decent greenhouse and vegetable patch. If you try to be too ambitious with the limited space available, your garden will look cluttered and overly small. It is far better to commit to a specific usage, such as entertaining. Then, you can define a generous seating area with a focal point to enjoy when relaxing.
5. Verticals: It is essential to utilise all the available space in a small garden; this includes vertical space. Raised beds made from sleepers can be used for planting and for doubling up as seating. Use a trellis to support climbers and clothe walls – you can also use hanging baskets and wall pots to decorate fences, walls or railings, especially where balconies are concerned. Planting in tiers can make a much greater use of the space and adding containers will create further planting pockets. Arches and mini pergolas can give additional height and dimension. Your small, cubic space will now be well and truly filling up.
6. Clear: It is time to start clearing the garden, so you can begin this transformation.
7. Mark out: Use lengths of rope or spray paint to mark out pivotal elements of your design on the ground, determining if the initial design will work when built. Changes can still be made to the design at this point, if needed.
8. Build: Building your hard landscaping elements comes next, including paths, seating areas and structures. This really does give the garden its skeleton structure, ready for plants to soften up the overall look.
9. Soil: Ensure that you have inspected and tested the soil, improving it with compost and organic material where necessary. You can never spend enough time understanding your soil and improving its structure. Soil properties are paramount to a successful garden of any size.
10. Plant: It's time to bring your garden to life by introducing plants and softening that hard landscaping mentioned earlier. This is the most exciting time in the whole process – you finally get to appreciate the work you put in!
11. Dress: You can now add your garden furniture; any pots and ornaments that you would like to add. Consider all ornamentation against your design, ensuring the continuity of your chosen theme.
12. Feed: As a final step, you will need to feed and water the garden until the plants establish themselves. Watering thoroughly will encourage your plants to establish deep, healthy roots.

TOP 15 PLANTS FOR SMALL GARDENS

Don't let having a small garden stop you from creating something special. Browse our list of the best plants for small gardens; spend some time planning out how to get the best results from your garden.



1



Scan QR code
to buy

Acer Palmatum Dissectum 'Firecracker'

A true specimen small tree, perfect for the centre of a small garden. This Acer has a real presence and is impossible to walk past without stopping to study its delicate, feathery, dissected leaves. These leaves cloak the entirety of the plant and are a rich, dark purple colour. If this isn't enough, the leaves turn an incredible orange-red colour in autumn, earning it the name 'Firecracker' and making it the envy of all passers-by. For a small garden, this tree is perfect as it will grow slowly over many years to reach 3 metres in height and width.



2



Scan QR code
to buy

Ajuga 'Black Scallop'

A small plant with a big personality, this small spreading, ground-covering plant is a real character and perfect for a small garden. This evergreen perennial, with its dark purple, near black glossy leaves, spreads out aided by its creeping stems and forming mounds of 20 cm plus. In late spring to early summer, short spikes of deep blue flowers are born, which look stunning against the dark leaves. Ajuga 'Black Scallop' is happy in the sun but is a good plant for a shady space.



3



Scan QR code
to buy

Cotoneaster Horizontalis

A hugely underrated shrub that is both tough and has excellent seasonal qualities. Beautiful small glossy leaves show up small white flowers that appear in early summer. As the growing season comes to an end this Cotoneaster puts on an autumnal display of red bright red berries for the end part of the year.



4



Scan QR code
to buy

Euonymus Fortunei 'Harlequin'

The small garden needs big characters, and this little Euonymus is certainly one of them. A hardy semi-evergreen perennial shrub. Its oblong, variegated leaves develop a pink tinge in winter. In colder regions or more exposed gardens, it may drop its leaves, but they will soon re-appear in springtime. This reliable little plant will reach a height of 30 to 50 centimetres and is tolerant of a wide range of soil types. Usefully it can grow happily in sunshine or partial shade.



5



Scan QR code
to buy

Geranium Rozanne

Geranium Rozanne is a multi-award-winning plant, and for very good reason. It is a sizeable mound-forming Geranium producing abundant blue flowers from May through September. The stunning blue flowers complement the distinctive sizeable white eye centre luring bees all summer. When drawing up a list of the best plants for small gardens, Geranium 'Rozanne' should always appear near the top.

TOP 15 PLANTS FOR SMALL GARDENS

Don't let having a small garden stop you from creating something special. Browse our list of the best plants for small gardens; spend some time planning out how to get the best results from your garden.



6



Scan QR code
to buy

Erysimum 'Bowles's Mauve'

Perfect for a small garden, this award-winning, bushy evergreen perennial will happily sit in a border or container. Reaching a height and spread of 75 centimetres plus, the erect spires of purple-mauve blooms are perfectly complimented by its small, narrow silver-grey-green foliage. Flowering from spring through to early winter, it is no wonder that Erysimum 'Bowles's Mauve' was shortlisted for Plant of the Century. It loves a growing space that sits in full sun.



7



Scan QR code
to buy

Mahonia 'Soft Caress'

The Mahonia is a beautiful evergreen shrub with real architectural qualities. In a small garden, this plant can be treated as a real standout specimen shrub which has the special quality of flowering in late summer through autumn and even stretching into winter. The leaves are narrow and spine free, making it different from other Mahonia, whose leaves are usually spiky.



8



Scan QR code
to buy

Sarcococca Confusa

One consideration to be made is the scents used in a small garden. A small space filled with the sweet smell of a fragrant plant will really bring a garden to life. This amazing plant – with its glossy, lanceolate leaves – flowers throughout the winter, producing small but abundant white flowers which are followed by red, purple or black berries. It is a compact, evergreen shrub and reaches a metre in height and spread.



9



Scan QR code
to buy

Acer Palmatum 'Going Green'

Acer Palmatum 'Going Green' is a stunning shrub or small tree that provides a dazzling display of autumnal colour. Its value in a small garden is in providing year-round interest as its foliage transitions through a spectrum of colours.

Tiny, inconspicuous green flowers precede red-winged seeds towards the end of summer. However, it is the fine-toothed green leaves which turn orange and then red that provide the most impact.



10



Scan QR code
to buy

Brunnera Macrophylla

For gardeners looking to create a rustic, natural effect in a small garden, the Brunnera is the perfect addition. Brunnera Macrophylla is a relaxed looking plant with large heart-shaped leaves which form herbaceous clumps spread by underground stems (rhizomes.) The greatest advantage of this plant, though, is its ability to live in deep shade; its ground-covering nature means that it is a perfect example of a plant allowing the gardener to use all available space.

TOP 15 PLANTS FOR SMALL GARDENS

Don't let having a small garden stop you from creating something special. Browse our list of the best plants for small gardens; spend some time planning out how to get the best results from your garden.



11

Heuchera 'Palace Purple'

The genus of Heuchera is now a firm favourite of the gardener, offering evergreen foliage and dainty sprays of white flowers. Its compact size makes it perfect for the small garden space. Heuchera 'Palace Purple' bears stunning crimson leaves with a satin sheen. This semi-evergreen perennial is a clump-forming, 30 centimetre tall plant that makes for an eye-catching ground-cover display when planted in large numbers. This is a shade-loving plant that is perfect for offering year-round interest in gardens of any size.



12

Salix Gracilistyla Melanostachys 'Kurome'

At first a Willow tree is not the first plant one would think of when it comes to a small garden. This Black willow is a bushy shrub that will not get beyond 3 meters in height and spread but its size can easily be contained with careful pruning. Named commonly the Black Willow the name reflects its striking black coloured catkins that appear in early spring, these catkins have orange-red anthers that turn deeper orange as they age.



Scan QR code
to buy



13

Sedum Autumn Joy (Herbstfreude)

Sedum Autumn Joy is a wonderful plant in any sized garden, flowering from summer through until late Autumn. Succulent, green leaves are topped by rusty-red-pink flowers attracting insects and butterflies to your garden. Grows to a height and spread of 60cm. The RHS bestowed its Award of Garden Merit upon Autumn Joy, ensuring its ongoing appeal to gardeners.



Scan QR code
to buy



14

Pieris Japonica 'Polar passion'

Pieris japonica 'Polar Passion' is a small compact evergreen shrub that adds real character to any small garden. This beautiful Japanese native small shrub will flush red shoots of new growth in spring, followed by small dark pink and white cupped flowers from March through May. These flowers look incredible against the dark leathery green foliage. It is happy to grow in a sunny aspect but also in partial shade and can grow under larger trees.



Scan QR code
to buy



15

Rosa 'Nostalgie'

Roses are of course renowned for their flowers, and this one produces creamy white-edged petals with a cherry-red border. Like all the best Roses, it also scented, filling a small garden with perfume. Rose Nostalgie grows as small deciduous shrub reaching 80 to 100 centimetres in height and will require a sunny aspect.



Scan QR code
to buy

Garden Furniture For Every Garden



ALFRESCO TRADING
www.AlfrescoTrading.co.uk



Professional Grade Composts specially produced and formulated from entirely natural ingredients to maximise plant health and development

Available online and from selected stores
www.CompostKing.co.uk

SMALL GARDENS

How to make the most of a small garden and the 15 best plants to use

Get in touch

www.GardeningExpress.co.uk

Gardening Express - Leading UK Gardening Website Specialising In Plants And Garden Accessories.

Copyright © 2022 Gardening Express Ltd. All Right Reserved.

Gardening Express, 1386 London Road, Leigh On Sea, SS9 2UJ.



Photo by Joe Wiedenmeier