

# MODERN GARDENS

What are they? How do I create one?  
Here are some of the best plants to  
make a modern garden:





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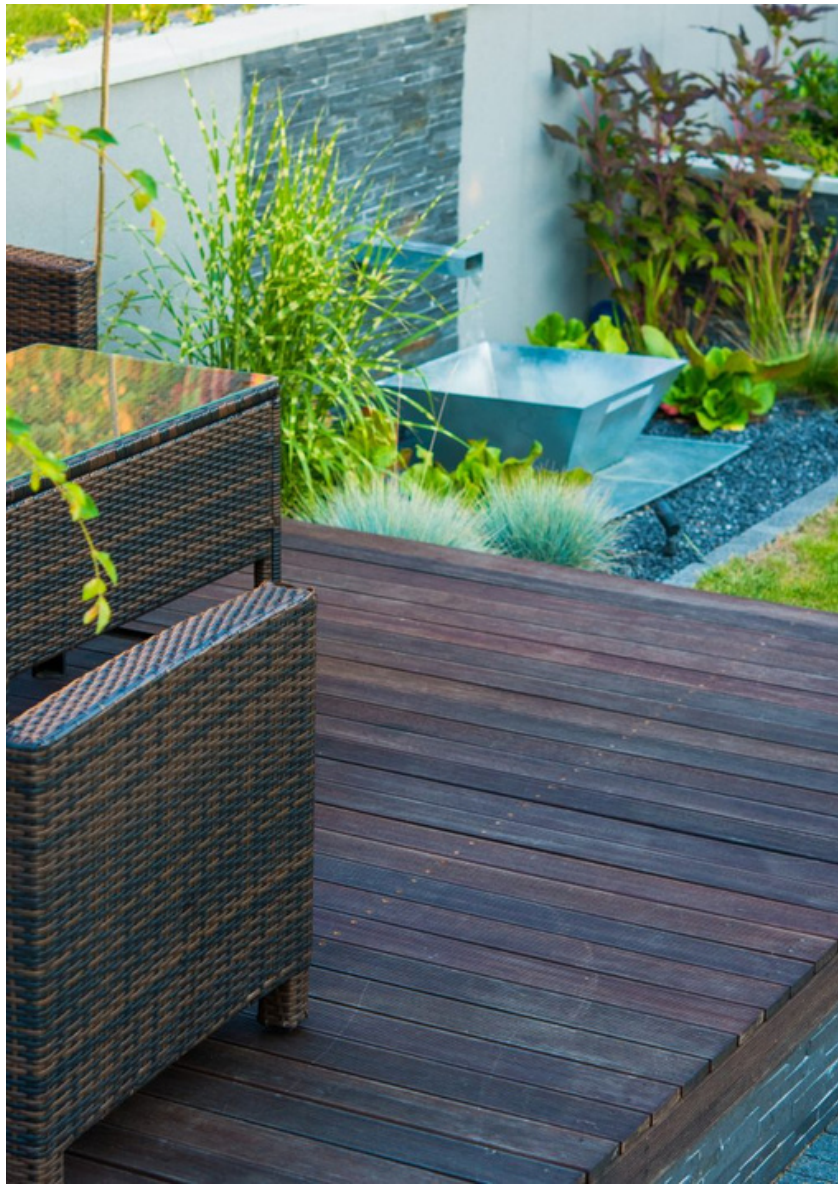
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# Table of CONTENTS

03	Introduction
04	How to Create a Modern Garden in 10 Easy Steps
05 - 07	Top 10 Plants for Modern Gardens
08 - 09	Inspiration

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# INTRODUCTION



## What is a modern garden?

Contemporary living is diverse; the same said for modern garden design. Gardens are essentially an extension of the living space and a means of escaping the relentless pace of life. The average garden size has got smaller as the population increases, but this shouldn't be an excuse to create your private oasis. Modern housing also uses different materials from bygone years, with materials such as glass and cladding standing more prominent and eco-housing being more futuristic. As a result, modern garden design has incorporated the same materials to tie in the garden with the house.

## Modern Garden Ideas: Creating a modern Garden

Modern garden design tends to see the garden as an extension of your living area. Gardens often appear geometric and formal whilst employing materials used in house construction. There are several specific considerations when contemplating a contemporary garden.

- **Materials** – modern gardens often employ glass, metal, geometric concrete paving and machined timber. There are no constraints; however, don't overdo it and respect the materials used on the dwelling.
- **Seating / Dining / Cooking / Furniture** – modern gardens can act as an additional dining area; if this is the case, try to construct a generous seating area. Investigate early-on the type of garden furniture you will be buying, as the furniture itself will define the look and feel of the garden. There are some incredible outdoor cooking products now available – even IKEA sells garden kitchens
- **Plants** – Modern gardens like to employ architectural planting where the foliage of the plants is more significant than the flowers themselves – look at our recommended list below.
- **Boundaries** – Your garden fences, walls and boundaries will play a significant role in defining the finished look and feel of the garden. Consider alternative materials such as rendered blockwork or modern screens, such as those of Screen with Envy.
- **Levels** – changes in tiers within a garden add significant interest. Decking offers a cheap way to create level changes, whilst gabions are a modern retaining wall idea.
- **Lights** – Lighting in the garden extends the amount of time that you can gain enjoyment from your garden. Consider once again how you intend to use your garden and at what times. A beautifully lit garden can be a significant extension of the house. Modern solar-powered lighting also means that garden lighting can be cost-effective.
- **Structure** – Garden structures have taken on more importance since Covid with so many people working from home and installing a garden office. Additionally, for people stuck at home all day, a garden room offers a way to escape from the house. There are so many available options that you are spoilt for choice.
- **Water** – a water feature can enhance every type of garden and especially a contemporary design. I enjoy a reflective pool but again the choice of water features grows by the day. Keep your focus on all the other design elements you have selected and ensure consistency of design.
- **Accessories** – Give some thought to how you want to dress up your garden. Planters can provide you with the means to inject some accent colour and plants into an otherwise empty space. Modern gardens without the right accessories can look stark and harsh – give them a little bit of personality. Be more adventurous and add some wall features such as external canvases.



# HOW TO CREATE A MODERN GARDEN IN 10 EASY STEPS

1. **Plan** - Start by thinking about how you use the space. Is the garden for entertaining, eating or just relaxation? Consider maintenance requirements and how much time you can devote to upkeep. Think about the style and what plants will help to shape this.
2. **Sketch** - Sketch where you want the various garden elements to go. You must carefully measure the space, then start by identifying the key areas, such as the seating zones. If the garden is small, you may want to consider where you place garden features to draw the eye. Make a note of where pathways will be placed to join the various areas of the garden
3. **Clear the space** – Its time to clear the garden, and remove anything that isn't staying
4. **Mark out the space** – Use a rope or spray can to identify paved areas, planting areas and structures. Walk around the garden space and gauge if the seating areas feel adequate.
5. **Establish changes in level** – The first bit of hardened landscaping is to create the changes in tiers. If your garden is on a slope, you may need to build some retaining walls. If your garden is flat, consider using decking to create changes in levels.
6. **Hard landscaping/water features** – build your paved area, paths and bases for any structures. Make changes to your boundaries and fencing. Additionally now is the time to set up your water features. Consider installing irrigation to reduce maintenance time.
7. **Construction of structures/buildings** – install your garden structures and any outdoor buildings
8. **Improve soil** – before planting, ensure that your soil is going to help your plants to establish and thrive. Contemporary garden planting often includes bold architectural foliage plants that require decent free-draining soil.
9. **Plant** - Your garden finally comes to life when you install plants into your garden.
10. **Accessorise** - it's time to dress your garden with furniture, planters and wall art.



# TOP 15 PLANTS FOR MODERN GARDENS



1



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## Buxus Sempervirens

This is a real a formal gardens favourite, found in great formal gardens such as Versaille and Hampton Court. It can grow into a large evergreen shrub reaching up 5 meters, but it is rarely seen in this form. Its ability to take heavy pruning and clipping means it is clipped into many shapes. it is true to say nothing says formal like the Box plant. Its small oblong glossy leaves are dense and profligate due to close clipping.



2



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## Euphorbia 'Ascot Rainbow'

Euphorbias are a popular early summer garden plant, loved for their acrid yellow-green foliage. There are over 1500 different species of Euphorbia so the modern gardener has lots of choices. Euphorbia 'Ascot Rainbow' (Martins Spurge) forms a mound of stunning creamy-edged leaves with a pink-flushed interior. Euphorbias have an architectural appearance that becomes more fascinating the closer you get. Ascot Rainbow grows up to a meter in height and spreads up to 75cm.



3



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## Carex Comans 'Frosted Curls' – OOS

Grasses are a real asset to a garden when chosen and planted with thought. Their fine foliage and feathery flower heads are great for capturing light and wind. They are excellent foils for other plants, particularly large-leaved specimens or deciduous forms that can be heightened through the winter months. Carex comans 'Frosted Curls' is primarily grown for its foliage which is slender, silvery green and shimmers in the breeze.



4



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## Cordyline Australis 'Red Star'

For a tough but exotic-looking plant, very architectural by nature, look no further than Cordyline 'Red Star'. Planted singly in a container or to the side of a doorway, this plant makes a statement with its spiky lance-like leaves that come in burgundy deep red. These spiky leaves grow from a crown adjacent to a single stem; however, as the plant ages, it can produce multiple stems and crowns that reach 1.5 metres in height and reach.



5



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## Hydrangea 'Limelight'

Hydrangeas are a graceful, special genus of shrubs; they always stand out in a garden. Hydrangea 'Limelight' is a superb addition to a modern outdoor space. Its flowers are truly amazing, conically shaped and up to 30cm in size; they are that beautiful subtle lime green colour. The flowers are long-lasting and gradually fade to white, tinged in pink. The floral display appears in autumn to mark the change in the seasons.



# TOP 15 PLANTS FOR MODERN GARDENS



6

## Laurus Nobilis

The Bay tree is another commonly found plant in formal gardens. If left to its own devices it will grow to an 8-metre evergreen shrub, although that can take up to 30 years. More commonly, it is pruned into a standard shape and placed in containers outside doorways, making it perfect for the modern garden. Its leathery green, ovate leaves are dense, and the plant also produces small yellow-green flowers in spring, preceding glossy black fruit.



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7

## Salix 'Flamingo'

'Flaming Salix' is a real talking point in a modern-style garden, and it's a hard plant to ignore. Long narrow foliage from which it gets its name flushes deep pink in spring, covering its entire surface. The leaves then become mottled with green-white and pink as they age but there may be a second flush of pink later in the summer. Its younger stems are orange-red in colour, and yellow catkins can be seen in spring as the leaves start to break.



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8

## Olea Europea

Once these classic Mediterranean plants would have been considered an impossible to growing the UK but with milder growing conditions are becoming a more common site. They truly incredible plants that can live to over a couple of thousand years in parts of the middle East. Primarily grown for their much-desired fruit and oil they also make great ornamentals. Their small narrow leaves have a leathery mid green texture on the surface and silver on the underneath, the shimmer and rattle the in wind.



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9

## Phormium Tenax Variegata

The New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax variegatum*) is a plant that fits well in various garden types but looks great in a formal modern garden. Its tough leathery, sword-like leaves form arching dense clumps of foliage. It is an evergreen perennial by nature, and its leaves are variegation of green and cream and can reach up to 1.5 metres in height and width. In spring, it sends out large panicles of large dull red flowers. Phormiums enjoy a full sun position but tolerate all the ranges of soil.



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10

## Prunus Lusitanica

Larger shrubs can form the backbone of a Modern garden, and the Portuguese Laurel will add structure to a border or perimeter of a garden or even be planted in containers. This hardy evergreen shrub has dark waxy leaves that are narrow and ovate, born on dark red shoots. It produces spikes of white flowers in early summer, followed by dark purple fruits. A superb hedging subject, this Prunus is happy to grow in all soil types but will need them to drain freely.



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# TOP 15 PLANTS FOR MODERN GARDENS



11

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## Campsis 'Indian Summer'

A bright and cheery climbing plant that has an exotic look and feel about it. Campsis will look great softening the hard front of a plastered wall or rambling through some railings. Campsis 'Indian Summer' is a deciduous perennial with dark green compound leaves and produces stunning trumpet-shaped yellow-orange flowers that appear from mid-summer and last into autumn. They climb using arial roots which further gives them that tropical feel.



12

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## Ilex crenata

A relation of the Holly, this evergreen shrub or small tree, has a dense habit with small spiny glossy green leaves and small white flowers born in summer and followed by black fruits in autumn. It has real garden merit as it is easily pruned into a low hedge or clipped into an evergreen specimen feature. Ilex crenata is happy in sun or partial shade and is happy growing in an exposed site having the ability to withstand cold winds.



13

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## Festuca glauca Blue Fescue

This amazing dwarf grass is as near to true blue as it gets. When grown in clusters of sevens and nines, it becomes almost sculpture-like with its neat habit. It combines beautifully in the modern garden with contemporary materials such as galvanised planters and architectural plants such as Phyllostachys nigra (Black bamboo).



14

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## Photinia serratifolia 'Pink Crispy'

The Photinia genus has become hugely popular in recent years, both with designers and gardeners alike. They are tidy, elegant shrubs that are perfect for the modern garden. In smaller spaces, Photinia can be clipped to shape or grown in a container. The bright pink and red fresh shoots in spring are beautiful and striking, giving any modern garden a lift.



15

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## Hibiscus syriacus 'Red Hearted Hamabo'

A deciduous, hardy Hibiscus whose late summer flowering and compact shape make it an excellent addition to the modern style garden. The almost tropical-looking flowers are gentle white to soft pink with amazing red heart-shaped markings at the base of their petals. They are born in August, generously covering the plant and present into September. They provide the modern garden with a generous cover of colour as other floral displays of plants end.





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# MODERN GARDENS

## How to create one and what plants to use

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