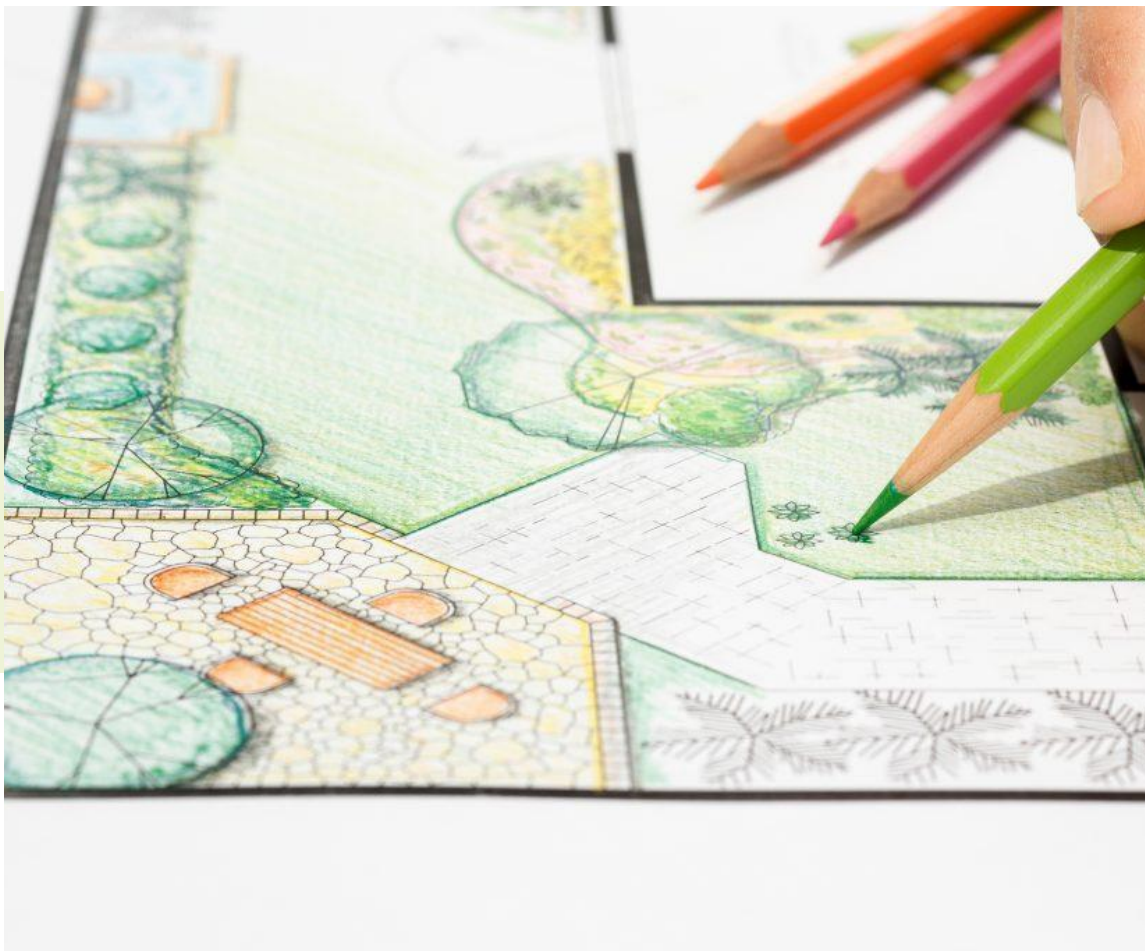


GARDEN DESIGN PRINCIPLES



HOW TO DESIGN AND CREATE A RESIDENTIAL GARDEN WITH IMPACT

In the late 90's garden designers were all over the tv creating weird and wonderful gardens. Despite there being many more channels these days there are fewer garden makeover programs to watch and learn from. If you are looking to design your own garden it is important to understand some garden design principles to ensure that you create a beautiful garden you can enjoy. In this article we look at the essential principles you need to consider in your garden.





WHAT MAKES A GOOD GARDEN DESIGN?

10 garden design principles need to be adopted within a garden. Think of them as garden design best practices.

01: Unity & cohesion

All garden elements must work together to produce a visually appealing complete garden. Variations of forms, colours, materials and focal points can become jarring to the eye, so consideration needs to be given to all objects to be included in a garden. You are looking to create harmony in the garden, which is achieved through unity.

Repetition of plants, objects and materials is a great way to achieve unity. Different areas of a garden can be connected by using the same plants or paving materials.

Pro Tip: Start by identifying the ‘style’ of the garden you want to create and consider how every item reinforces that style. Look at our garden style guides for inspiration and help:

- [Jungle garden style guide](#)
- [Mediterranean garden style guide](#)
- [Formal garden style guide](#)
- [Modern garden-style guide](#)



02: *Genius loci*

The Genius loci of a garden refer to its 'sense of place' or distinctive atmosphere. When designing a garden you need to heighten your awareness of how each element of a garden fits into the overall design.

Use the existing architecture of the house to inform the garden design and ensure that the house and garden work together. You will also need to look at your boundaries as they will heavily influence the feel of the garden. Your surrounding area also impacts the atmosphere of your garden so consider your neighbour's houses and gardens.

03: *Movement, transition & direction*

Consideration needs to be given to how visitors to the garden will circulate the space and the impact this will have on the look and feel of the space. Small gardens can feel significantly larger by well-crafted design, while extensive gardens can be dull due to poor design.

The placement of seating areas, paths and focal points are the main drivers of movement within a garden and are often the design elements that should be considered early on.

How people move around your garden and the direction that they follow leads to the need to consider how different areas of the garden will transition. Large gardens are often broken up into a series of smaller zones or rooms. The success of this design technique will be affected by the successful implementation of transition areas.

04: Balance

Balance within a garden results from consideration of form, size, texture, colour and scale. Balance can be real or a perception and is often split into:

- Symmetrical balance
- Asymmetrical balance

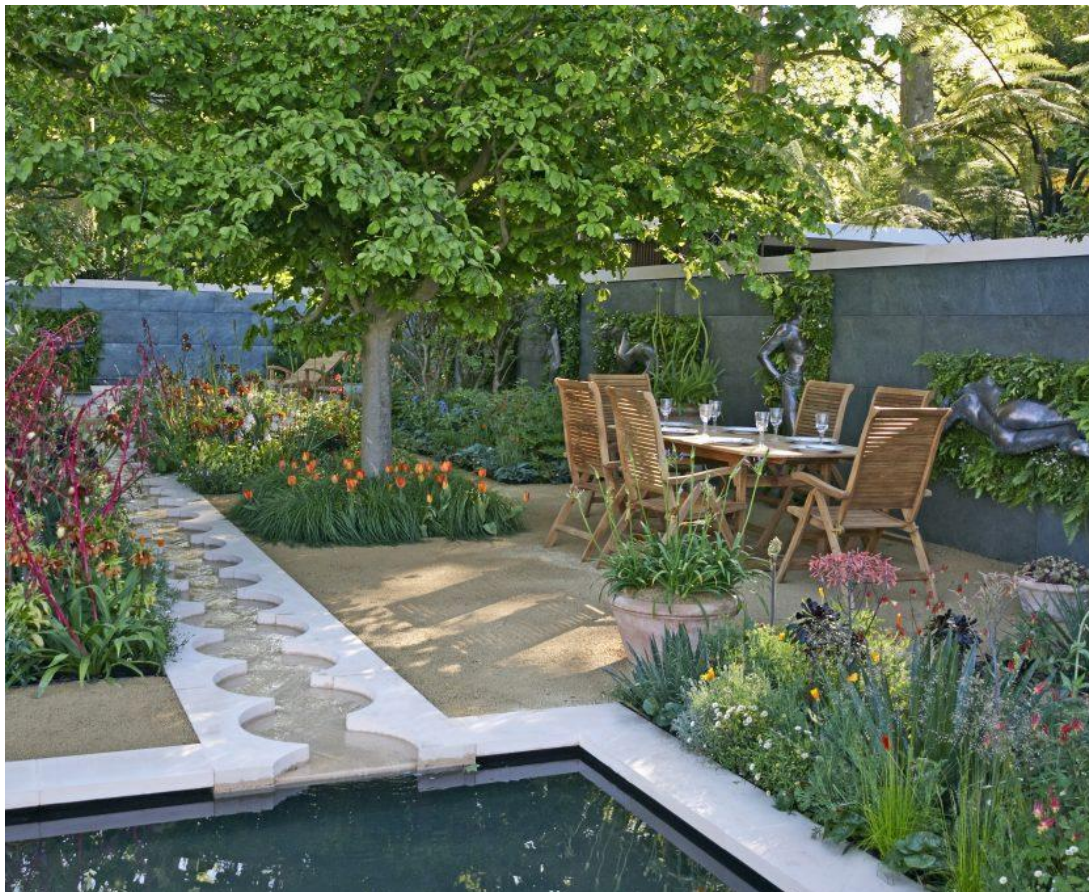
Symmetrical balance

Formal gardens use symmetrical balance where a garden is mirrored along a central axis; in simple terms, the garden is identical on both sides.

Asymmetrical balance

Informal gardens result from the arrangement of garden elements being different on different sides of the garden however the overall weight of the two sides of a garden is equal.

A garden also requires a balance between functionality and beauty. Many clients that I have worked with over the years have wanted a garden that is low in maintenance but offers years-round interest. There is a balance to be had between how beautiful a garden looks and the time required to maintain its beauty.



05: Rhythm

Rhythm within garden design refers to the role of plants and hard landscaping- elements encouraging a sense of movement. This movement may involve a visitor walking around the garden or simply drawing your eye around the space.

Rhythm tends to be established by repeating the same plants, objects and materials at a standard interval. This repetition creates an implied line that the human eye will likely want to follow.

06: Repetition

We have talked about how repetition can encourage rhythm and unity, however, the repetition of plants also produces a more natural and pleasing aesthetic. In nature when the conditions are right for a plant to grow then it will grow in volume and not just a single specimen. You should aim to replicate this by planting in drifts rather than individual specimens dotted around.

The garden designer Piet Oudolf reintroduced the concept of planting in masses or drifts to create cohesion.

07: Transition

As you move through your garden, you will transition from one area to another. You have the first of many transitions as you exit your house and enter the garden. When designing your garden, you need to consider the impact you would like to achieve from area to area. Traditionally transition referred to 'gradual change', with the area of the garden closest to the house being the most formal. As you moved away from the house, the garden would graduate to a more informal style.

In modern design, it is not uncommon to discover distinctive zones within a garden with a harsh change between them achieved by obscuring the view from one area to another. Abrupt transitions must be carefully managed and thought given to the scale and proportion of diving screens.





08: Simplicity

A successful garden design results from the elimination of undue complexity within a garden. The transition from house to garden needs to be smooth and aesthetically pleasing. In architectural design the 'regulating line' is a concept where the proportions of geometry in buildings provide harmony and order. Often garden designers will project the lines of the house throughout the garden space which helps to create a sense of unity.

'A regulating line is an assurance against capriciousness: it is a means of verification which can ratify all work created in a fervour.'

'The regulating line is a satisfaction of a spiritual order which leads to the pursuit of ingenuous and harmonious relations. It confers on the work the quality of rhythm.'

'The choice of the regulating line is one of the decisive moments of inspiration, it is one of the vital operations of architecture.'

-Le Corbusier – Towards a new architecture

In simple terms regulating lines are imaginary lines projecting from architecture such as doorways and edges of buildings. These lines can be used to help with the layout of garden elements resulting in a cohesive design.

Simplicity can also refer to the number of materials used in a garden or the colour of plants. Work with a restricted palette of materials and colours to achieve harmony.



09: Scale/proportion

Proportion is a comparative relationship between the objects in a garden. Consider the size, quantity and position of objects and how they affect each other. To achieve a unified design, all objects will balance proportionally with each other with no dominant elements.

The house is often the starting point for determining the size of other objects placed within a garden. If you have a garden broken up into distinct areas, then for each area, you should identify a fixed element, such as the boundary line and use that as the basis of size for all other elements.

Very often, people tend to select items in their garden that are undersized where they should have been bolder and selected a larger item. If in doubt pick larger garden features and be bold with plant selection.

10: Focalisation

Humans enjoy being directed in life, and this is true in gardens. Including focal points within the garden defines where the eye should pause and results in a pleasing design.

The position of focal points traditionally is at 'vanishing points' at the end of pathways and regulating lines. Focalisation is the process of directing garden visitors in a controlled way to enjoy aspects of the garden you deem appropriate.

Great gardens don't happen by chance. Every decision you make about your garden needs to be carefully considered against the design principles. Having spent a decade as a garden designer, I am constantly surprised by how homeowners treat their gardens. I meet clients in stunning houses where careful thought has gone into every detail of their house. However, good taste seems to evade people when they step out into the garden. Many people pick individual items, such as garden furniture, without considering how they fit into a broader scheme.

ELEMENTS OF GARDEN DESIGN

Gardens are made up of many different objects or elements. It is the blend of these elements that you need to work with to achieve the principles of garden design.

01: Line

The use of lines in garden design cannot be underestimated. Lines occur at the edge of all objects and the choice of straight or curved lines in the garden significantly impacts the 'atmosphere' of the garden.

The human eye is drawn to following lines so use this to determine where focal points are positioned.

The straight lines of pathways are forceful and direct humans in a fast and dynamic motion. Conversely, curves are graceful, ambiguous and natural, resulting in a relaxed amble.

02: Focal point

Focal points can be any object you choose that will capture a garden visitor's attention. In a small garden, furniture such as benches serves a dual purpose and makes excellent use of the space. Plant containers within beds draw the eye, offering cause to pause and focus rather than constantly surveying the bed.

03: Form

Form refers to the shape, structure or outline of the objects that make up your garden. The form of plants is constantly changing through the seasons and the plant's lifetime. Plant form is divided into the following categories:

- Upright
- Oval
- Columnar
- Spreading
- Broad spreading
- Weeping

Plants grouped also create a collective form. Plant form can heavily influence how a visitor views a garden, with columnar plants drawing the eye skyward whilst spreading plants encouraging the eye towards the ground.



On a lower level, plant leaves have their form, which combines to create the texture of the plant.

Structures in the garden such as pergolas and arches have their own form and you need to consider how to combine the form of plants and objects to create harmony within the garden.

04: Colour

Your choice of colour in the garden will influence flowers, foliage, materials and focal points. The palette you choose will determine the ‘feel’ of the garden. Cottage gardens are known for their riot of colour, whilst formal modern gardens are more conservative, dominated by green foliage.

05: Texture

The textures of plants, foliage and hard landscaping materials provide an additional layer of interest to please the senses. Encouraging visitors to touch and feel their way around the garden is a wonderful distraction, especially in smaller spaces.

Combining tactile objects close to focal points add to visitors’ enjoyment and is a well-used ploy of garden designers.