

Garden Design Top Tips

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at VaRa Garden Design.

With the weather finally turning warmer, you may now have the chance to venture out and sit in your garden (and not just look at it from indoors!). Whilst you're enjoying the sights and sounds that summertime has to offer, it's the perfect time to take stock of what works and what doesn't in your outdoor space, and make plans. How do you want to feel in your garden next summer? Have you got grand designs on how you'd prefer to use the space?

Now is a great time to plan a garden refresh, whether it be the layout, the planting, or both. There are lots of elements to consider, for example;



Does your garden offer lots of interest at the beginning of the summer and then go quiet for the rest of the year?

Does it have little to offer you when you look out from your house, particularly in the winter?

When you are in your garden, what catches your eye?

Do you want to introduce the sound of water for your own relaxation or perhaps to encourage more wildlife?

Are there areas where you require some privacy or screening?

Do the routes out of the house just take you the wrong way?!

Another way of looking at it is, how do you want to use your garden?

Do you like to sit out to eat and need a larger patio space?

Would you like some shade so that you can sit out even when it's really hot?

Perhaps you want to reduce the size of your lawn and introduce more planting?

Would you like some growing space for vegetables or cut flowers?

Make some notes about the things that work and those you wish to change.

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VaRa Rural Country Garden

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VaRa Contemporary Country Garden
& Urban Garden

It's also good to think about framing the views within the garden and back to your house; take photos from different positions and think about what you are looking at all year round. The right layout should create routes and destinations to invite you out there and back - even in small gardens it's important to get this right.

So once you have made some decisions about what you want to achieve, how do you set about making it happen? Well, it's important to remember that you don't always need to start from scratch.

Consider what plants you can keep in your existing space; what looks healthy or is growing well, locally to you. It's likely that similar plants will work in the similar conditions of your garden too. Just be mindful of sun and shade within your own space - 'right plant, right place' is key to help getting plants to establish quickly and thrive in your garden.

Aside from plants, is there a cherished sculptural piece, like a large pot or a bird bath, that you could reposition to retain the essence of your garden (and avoid spending money unnecessarily)?! These sort of elements add permanence and focal points to a garden, all year round.

Can you repurpose other hard landscaping materials that are already in the space? It makes good design (and economical) sense to use or add to what you have already. Linking materials, colours and textures is vital to making the garden feel considered and cohesive.



framing the views with the garden



Planting can be an impactful way of making a change. Here are our top tips for what to add:

The areas close to the house are visible year round, so choose plants that have long seasons of interest with strong silhouettes or interesting shapes, even when they have lost their leaves. Look out for colourful bark or autumn colour. Choosing early and late flowering plants, and using bulbs to extend the season, not only helps wildlife but gives you more to look at for longer. Even when flowers have died back, plants can retain amazing foliage and seed heads that can last right through the winter.

Try not to be tempted to buy one of everything that is looking good at the garden centre. Instead, look at the conditions the plant will work in and always buy multiples in odd numbers, unless it's a real statement one-off plant or two plants to sit either side of a door or path. It's really hard not to succumb but it will really help bring rhythm to the planting!

All gardens need evergreen planting to underpin the structure of the garden year round and most gardens could benefit from adding a tree. There are all sorts of shapes and sizes that will work. A tree in a large pot in a small courtyard garden can work wonders, and there are plenty of suitable options for smaller gardens if you want to add a bit of privacy and height. Trees bring great structure and vertical interest to a garden, which can often be missing. They also have a really positive effect on the environment, helping with air quality, providing wildlife habitat and offering shade in the summer months.

Finally, if you have space (even a small patch will help) try and have a wilder area - wildflower turf works well, and try not to be too tidy especially through the colder months. Mark the seasons, there really is beauty and value in decay and it helps the natural world too.

If that all seems too tricky to bring together and you need some help try The Association of Professional Landscapers, which has a designer members register - just put in your postcode to find your local registered garden designers.

VaRa Garden Design is a local award-winning garden design duo who have some key design principles and advice to offer, to help you make the most of your outside space, however large or small.

VaRa Garden Design can be found here

