

Creativity vs problem solving

Welcome to our new series, in which expert Annie Guilfoyle looks at garden design problems. She starts by giving a few practical ideas to get us thinking creatively about solutions to common conundrums

WORDS ANNIE GUILFOYLE



Annie Guilfoyle is Director of Garden Design at KLC School of Design. She is also Garden Course Coordinator at West Dean College and runs her own garden design studio. "My clients and their gardens are very diverse. Ranging from tiny urban courtyards to large rural estates, they offer a wide variety of challenges. There is something to learn and discover on every project."

We expect so much from our outdoor spaces, whether it is a bijoux balcony or several acres. The garden needs to be all things to all people, catering to our increasingly busy lives and active families. The demands on the garden as a place for recreation, relaxation and food production can make the design process far more of a challenge than you might imagine.

The inspiration for this forthcoming series comes largely from my own design practice. When discussing the project brief with clients there are a number of requests that appear time after time. Almost without exception they will ask for 'colour all year round' closely followed by 'must be low maintenance'. Right up there on the wish list is 'increase screening and privacy' and 'please make my small garden seem larger'.

Problem solving frequently represents a large proportion of a design project and it would be unrealistic to say otherwise. I have seen garden design students become disillusioned when faced with a lengthy list of practical issues to overcome. Where to position the ubiquitous (and unsightly) trampoline? How best to hide the bins? Is it possible to screen the garden but still maintain the views? Can you fit a home office into a small garden and still have enough space for everything

else on the list? Creativity may start to dwindle at this point and it's very easy to lose heart.

I prefer to turn this situation on its head, firmly believing that really innovative designs can result from finding clever solutions to awkward problems. In my experience the most satisfying projects have often been the ones with the toughest challenges.

In this series, I will focus not only on the everyday design issues but also include a few of the more unusual topics. From making a small garden feel larger and disguising an awkwardly shaped plot, to working with a steeply sloping site and linking a house and garden. I will explain how to use plants effectively in key situations, such as planning a low-maintenance garden, achieving colour throughout the year, coping with an ever-changing climate and how to manage a waterlogged garden.

If designing your garden seems daunting, don't despair. Whether you are starting from scratch or making minor adjustments to an existing garden, practical advice will be mixed with suggestions of where to look for inspiration. From gardens and nurseries to suppliers and makers, there will be plenty of tips on how to find what you are looking for. □

NEXT MONTH Year-round colour in the garden.



MARIANNE MAJERUS

1 Winter warmer
Acer griseum is a beautiful tree that not only looks good in spring and summer but throughout the year. The rusty-brown, papery bark shimmers in the strong winter light, adding a warmth and texture to the harsh winter landscape.

2 Hedging

Screening is often a vital component in the garden but sometimes it's not necessary to have a solid hedge. At RHS Garden Rosemoor, *Lonicera nitida* forms the lower level of a hedge and pleached *Carpinus betulus* grows through it. An enticing gap offers a glimpse through to the next garden.



3 Adding intrigue

In this Hove garden we have positioned a beautiful handmade gate with a meandering path on the other side, which actually leads to nowhere. This technique can make a small garden appear larger by suggesting that there is another area to discover.



4 Home studio

Giving up a section of my own small garden to build a design studio was a tough decision. However, I don't regret it as I now use my garden much more, walking to and from the studio. It also allows me to view the garden from a new angle.



5 Focal points

There are various ways of adding colour and interest to a garden; one of them is in the form of art and sculpture. This mosaic-covered urn was made by a client for her own garden. Making your own garden feature can be very rewarding.

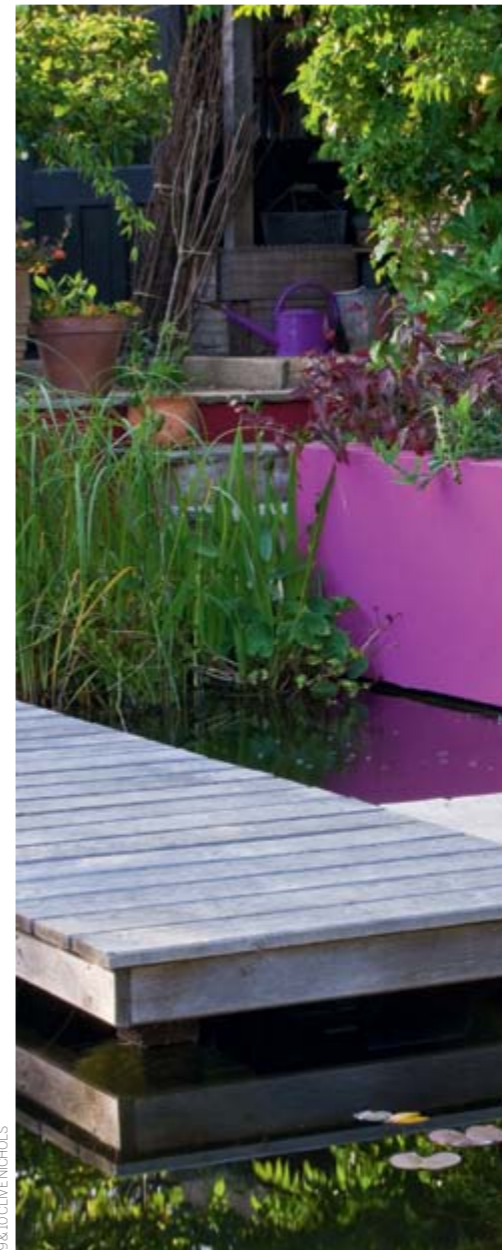


6 Blurring the boundaries

Linking the garden and landscape has been practised for centuries; even so it is still a very effective way of making the garden feel larger. This striking view from The Garden House in Devon includes the village church and the moors beyond, reinforcing the sense of place.



3 & 5: CLIVE NICHOLS, 7: MARIANNE MAJERUS



9 & 10: CLIVE NICHOLS

7 Winter colour

January can be such a bleak month, so for inspiration visit gardens such as the RHS gardens at Wisley. Here richly coloured *Cornus alba* 'Ruby' is planted alongside *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire', using the stems for interest and demonstrating that winter can be bright and colourful.

8 Storage solutions

As with houses, gardens can never have enough storage space. In the Zimmer Stewart Gallery in Arundel, we have built attractive stowaway storage cupboards that nestle into the corners of the garden. The sloping sedum roof drains any excess water into a galvanised trough planted with rhubarb.

9 Sloping gardens

Steeply sloping sites can make really interesting gardens, offering the possibility for each level to become a separate space. In this garden I have deliberately set the steps at an angle between raised beds, hiding them from view and softening the overall effect.

10 New features from old

Sometimes the answer is obvious; rather than fill in an unwanted swimming pool we transformed it into a large pond, with decking walkways, exotic plants and lots of fish. A pool that was used only occasionally is a now place to relax and is used far more.