



A corner is all you need to create a cosy little lounge area in your garden. [quercusgardens.com.au](http://quercusgardens.com.au)



This garden employs many space-enhancing tricks, including built-in seating. [quercusgardens.com.au](http://quercusgardens.com.au)

## SMALL GARDENS GUIDE

# SMALL WONDERS

*With a few tricks of the trade, even the tiniest garden can fulfil your every need*

**WORDS:** KAREN BOOTH

If your expectations are large but your garden small, don't despair. There is no shortage of clever space-maximising tricks of the trade you can employ to design a garden that will cater for all your lifestyle needs without ever feeling cramped or cluttered.

You can manipulate colour to make a space feel bigger and airier, use walls for plants and artworks, thereby saving precious ground space, or introduce built-in elements. But, of course, that's not all. "Introducing level changes creates depth by interrupting an otherwise small space," says Lisa Ellis of Lisa Ellis Gardens. "Level changes can simply mean an elevated or sunken patio or even perhaps raised planters and troughs."

Janine Mendel of CultivArt Landscape Design adds, "Raised garden beds can create sitting walls, which not only provide extra casual seating but lift the plants so they are visible from inside the house, over the furniture. Including plants is also important and using angles and curves in the underlying composition will allow for multilayered planting and give the garden a feeling of added depth.

"Ultimately, the key is to always have

meticulous attention to detail as everything will be viewed from close proximity. The area is small, so choose the best materials and finishes you can afford."

### TWICE AS NICE

Things that do double-duty, such as seats with concealed storage, are a clever way to maximise space and increase a garden's functionality. "Making use of multipurpose features is a good idea," says Lisa. "This could

### EXPERT TIP

"If you are a plant enthusiast who has run out of room for plants, have you thought about using your vertical spaces?" asks Glenice Buck of Glenice Buck Designs. "When garden beds are overflowing with plants and no more floor space can be taken up with pots and planters, a vertical garden (sometimes called a green wall) can come in very handy. They are also a great idea for those smaller spaces where traditional garden beds aren't possible. Vertical gardens help cool small areas, soften the appearance of structural walls and improve air quality."





In smaller gardens, curves slow the eye and create a feeling of more space. bayongardens.com.au



**ABOVE** Make use of hardscaping features such as walls to introduce texture and plants. rblandscapes.com.au  
**RIGHT** An urban courtyard skilfully designed to maximise every centimetre of space. outdoorestablishments.com

## PLANTING PERFECTION

"Plants are very important in that they create the sense of 'garden'. It may be that the variety of greenery is very limited, but it still softens and cloaks architecture and creates the appeal of living outdoors," says Lisa.

There are myriad ways plants can be employed. "A single tree planted in the ground, off centre, might be surrounded by a deck or paving. This tree may serve as a living sunshade in the warmer months eliminating the need for an umbrella or pergola. If that same species is deciduous, it then allows for the winter sun to shine," suggests Lisa.

"You could also consider the use of plant supports to create a 'green wall' on boundary lines where the footprint is too narrow for a hedge," she adds. "A plant support can be constructed from hardwood posts with reinforced mesh. A single species, such as star jasmine or gum vine can then be mass planted along the base of the screen."

Another option is to use fastigate or columnar trees. They don't take up much space and their height brings much-needed scale to the area — and the effect is even better if you have two of the same species off-set or an odd-number planting. A tip from Janine: "Select plants that look good for as much of the year as possible as they will be constantly on display."

## CONTAINER GARDENS

Container gardening is an easy means of having a flourish of foliage or a splash of floral colour in the smallest of outdoor spaces. Deck, patio, balcony, terrace or courtyard ... as long as you have a little floor or wall space, you can have just about anything you want, from potted colour to potted produce.

With a container garden, you can use the pot, the plant or both as a design element; you can move plants with ease if they're not thriving in a certain spot; you can change either the plants

## MIRROR, MIRROR

"When you find small outdoor spaces difficult to do anything with, outdoor mirrors may just be the answer," says Siita Rivas of Rivas Design. "They are one accessory that allows you to take advantage of the limitations small spaces present and turn them into features that work for you."

"Solid end walls on balconies or plain walls in courtyards are often overlooked as makeover opportunities, but outdoor mirrors work perfectly to style these spaces. Mirrors give small spaces a feeling of being intimate but not claustrophobic. They bring light to dull areas, create an increased sense of space and as night falls, they continue to catch light beautifully, reflecting the glow of garden lights."

"Like reflections on water, views captured by mirrors can be seen from a variety of angles. Sometimes the mirror gets mistaken for a window through to another space, other times the reflection it catches is of a distant view. And since it only needs a wall to hang on, a mirror is the ideal accessory for small spaces."

## SMALL GARDENS GUIDE

## PAVING POINTERS

Larger, lighter-coloured pavers create more of a spacious feel than small or narrow, darker-coloured pavers. If you want to add a little interest, you can create a sense of flow from one area of the garden to the next by using various tones of one colour. Bold, contrasting borders or decorative inserts tend to break up a garden into sections, which can make the whole space seem busier and, hence, smaller.

"Paving should be simple and without bevels or recessed joints that collect dirt and can make the pattern too busy," says Janine Mendel of CultivArt Landscape Design. "To make an area appear larger, lay paving on the diagonal or at an angle. Also, work out how much space you need for your required outdoor leisure activities and then give the rest of the garden over to plants, trees, water and a view to the sky. There is no point having a larger-than-necessary expanse of paving."

Photo: Natalie Hunt/valay





## LIGHT THE WAY

In the small garden, lighting is essential for myriad reasons, including aesthetics. "With the right outdoor lighting, you can accentuate the natural flow of the garden design and emphasise key features. This makes the space more appealing to use and highlights focal points, such as specimen trees," says Calley Crosswell from Gardens at Night.

Task lighting is another key element. This needs to be adequate for all the functions you need to perform outside, so includes such things as lighting for a barbecue area or outdoor kitchen. "You also need to consider safety," says Calley. "Ensure level changes and steps have adequate lighting; the same applies to garden paths. Your garden needs to be easy to navigate at night."

The key to lighting in any small garden is to be subtle. You don't want to overdo it and you don't want the space to be lit up like a carnival. "Use warm-colour temperature light; this makes it inviting," says Calley. A final word of advice? "Use good-quality products. Good results start with quality light fittings."

Here, Growing Rooms employed several techniques, such as the use of dark walls. [growingrooms.com.au](http://growingrooms.com.au)

## SMALL GARDENS GUIDE



or the pots to refresh the look of an outdoor space; and when you move house, you can take your garden with you.

The containers you use for your plants form part of your outdoor decorating scheme, so need to be chosen for their visual appeal as well as functionality. And their size, colour and placement are just as important. In smaller spaces, a limited number of strategically placed larger pots with feature plants can look better than a clutter of little ones.

Where you do have a number of potted plants, it makes sense to stick to pots of similar colour, shape and finish, and avoid a jumble of too many different types. If there is not much ground space, you can opt for wall-mounted pots, those that can be affixed to a balcony railing, or hanging baskets.

## UP THE WALL

In any small outdoor space, the walls provide an opportunity to add interest, texture and colour without cluttering the main garden area. Laser-cut metal screens can be mounted on a house, garage or boundary wall to bring a decorative element into the space — and you can take it one step further with the addition of LED backlighting to turn it into a light box.

Wall plaques are another option as are framed outdoor prints, ornate weatherproof clocks and garden mirrors. In a small space, an outdoor mirror can do more than simply add a delightful decorative touch. Placed "just so", it can bring light to a dark corner, give the impression of increased space and add a feeling of depth. Courtyard or balcony, patio or garden

**TOP** Here, special features range from a built-in deck daybed to built-in seating — cool. [bayongardens.com.au](http://bayongardens.com.au)  
**ABOVE** Use garden edging to keep things neat and inbuilt seating to maximise your space. [bayongardens.com.au](http://bayongardens.com.au)





Curves make small areas less boxy, while cantilevered seating makes them seem airier. dalealcock.com.au



## PLAN AHEAD

"There are a lot of elements that can harmoniously fit into a small space; however, it requires thorough planning," says Paul Pritchard of Paul Pritchard Landscape Design & Construction. "Make a list of your requirements and rate them in order of importance. Measure out the realistic areas required for the elements on the list and plot them on a plan. Move the areas around until everything fits well. Prepare to compromise and to think outside the square."

"When I design for small areas, I like to keep at the front of the design the notion that we are building gardens. Plants are the major elements that tie the hard surfaces together. We are happier as people when we see, smell or touch a flower or plant. Maximise the space without making the area too stark. Always allow enough room for your green elements and don't understate garden areas to allow for hard surfaces. Green is better!"



## SMALL GARDENS GUIDE

*"The key is to always have meticulous attention to detail as every element will be viewed from close proximity"*

nook ... a mirror gives a small space a whole new perspective, not to mention a little sparkle.

A wall-mounted water feature is also a great idea. It adds the soothing sound of water in motion and in a small space such as a courtyard, it can even have a cooling effect. Options range from trough-style water features for a more classic look to water walls that send water rippling down a backdrop of stone, glass or metal.

## COLOUR IT IN

Use of colour is key. Lots of light, pale colours can make a smaller outdoor space seem a bit bigger, but the effect can be enhanced with the judicious use of darker colours. Deeper, cooler colours can make something seem a bit further away so if you paint a rear boundary wall or your fences a dark colour, these structures will seem to recede, making the space seem less closed in. Black fences in any garden, big or small, will highlight plant material and relegate the fence to the background.

If your garden doesn't get much natural light during the day, using warm, light-toned colours for paving and walling will help open up

the space and reflect what light there is. If the garden gets lots of bright light, darker tones will make it feel a bit cooler and absorb some of the sunlight. But don't go too dark over too many surfaces in a really small garden as that can make it feel hemmed in.

To prevent a small space from seeming busy, avoid using a kaleidoscope of colours. Incorporating various tones of the same colour for the big garden elements, such as paving and retaining walls, can work very well, leaving you to introduce accent colours with your decor (pots, wall plaques), furnishings (cushions, rugs) and flowers.

## SHADY DAYS

With smaller spaces, it's important to provide shade cover without restricting movement around the area or making it feel cramped. Use a critical eye and look at how people (and pet) traffic flows throughout the space and examine access points. The shade option you choose shouldn't have bulky fastenings or posts that block or impede movement.

Shade umbrellas are a great option as you

Maximise vertical planes with plants climbing up supports or green hedges. franklinld.com



**TOP LEFT** Note the use of trees placed in cut-outs within the deck and a black-painted fence. landscape.net.au

**ABOVE** With clever design, you can transform any small outdoor space into a garden oasis. outsidein.net.au

can extend them when needed and wind them in when you don't. A side-arm umbrella can take up less space than a centre-pole umbrella, but some models have bulkier arms than others, which will take up precious room. Shade sails are another option when you want something in place permanently. You might only need a smaller rectangular sail to directly cover a couple of deck chairs, not the whole exterior space.

Retractable and folding-arm awnings are another versatile choice, particularly for small areas. Today's awnings are a much more sophisticated affair, although the traditional folding-arm awning remains a good choice, providing protection from the sun and moderate rainfall, if there's enough angle for water run-off.

## FURNISH WITH FLAIR

Whether it's for a deck extending from the rear of the house or a petite patio in a bijoux backyard, the furniture you choose makes the difference between a space that will be used and one that will be avoided. While it's a given that the furniture needs to be comfortable, in restricted spaces, it also needs to be of the right scale and style.

"Don't choose bulky furniture," advises Janine. "Rather, select furniture that sits



## SMALL GARDENS GUIDE

Introducing level changes adds interest and creates different places to gather. bayongardens.com.au

## COLOUR CUES

- Dark colours provide a sense of greater depth and can make a fence or boundary wall seem to recede.
- Cool colours (green, blue, purple, grey) have the effect of making a space seem a little larger than it is.
- Warm colours (yellow, orange, red, pink) will make a wall or feature seem closer so use judiciously.
- Too many different colours can make a space seem busy. Use similar colours for a calmer effect.
- Too much white in a sunny area can cause glare and increase heat load, making the space uncomfortable.
- Use vivid colours as accents. If you love red, use it for cushions or flowers, but too much would be overwhelming.

Growing plants up a frame injects greenery, while curved seating saves space. boldsimplicity.com.au



Here, the area of paving is minimal and the vertical elements are used to perfection. pepo.com.au

lightly on the ground. If you can see the floor underneath the furniture, it will make the area seem larger.” “The use of ‘mesh’ and semi-transparent outdoor furniture can have a subtle effect, making a space seem larger,” adds Lisa.

Also, keep in mind that outdoor sofas with low backs ensure views won’t be blocked and if you like to entertain, choose stools that can double as side tables for drinks and be stacked away when not needed. Before rushing out to buy an outdoor setting, however, think about how you want to use the space. Once you have worked this out, you can choose furniture pieces to suit your most common activities. It’s better to buy one

setting with some flexibility than clutter up your small space with too many pieces.

## COMPACT POOLS

Providing an opportunity to exercise and cool down, a lap pool can run along a boundary wall or down the side of a house, making optimum use of the available space. Laps pools are often close to the house so material selection is critical. This might mean pool coping that matches the trim on the house or an interior pool colour that picks up a hue used on the home’s facade.

In a courtyard, a plunge pool may be all you can fit. It won’t be suitable for exercising, but it will help you cool down on a hot day and provide

somewhere you can gather with friends and a glass of something chilled. A plunge pool can be heated just like a standard-sized pool for use in winter or it can be designed to do double duty as a spa. Many plunge pools have a water feature integrated into their design. In this way, when the pool is not being used, you can turn on the water feature and the pool functions as a design focal point.

A swim spa is another option for the space challenged. There are portable designs, which look similar to a regular portable spa. Alternatively, swim spas can be installed in the ground or into a deck or patio. As with any element in a small garden, the key is to think strategically.