



# Landscaping for small spaces

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## **SMALL SPACE DESIGN – SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND**

“Small” is gardener-specific:

- Small spaces are sometimes dictated by one’s time to garden
- Small spaces are sometimes dictated by one’s desire to garden
- Whatever size the space is, it should be sized to manage comfortably. For some, 5 acres is too small; for others, a patio is too much work.
- If space size were based on sheer enthusiasm, Master Gardeners would have acres!

A small garden is at its best an outdoor room or extension of an indoor room; at its worst, a vacant lot or worm patch of ground.

## **CONSIDERATIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DESIGN – REGARDLESS OF SIZE**

- Function – how the site will be used
- Maintenance – how the site will be cared for
- Important to scout for insects and disease, paying close attention
- Treating with pesticides and herbicide become trickier because more of overall garden is affected plus neighbors as well;
- Environmentally-sound – the impact the site has on the ecosystem around it
- Cost effectiveness – input-related; the impact the site has on your pocketbook, time, and labor
- Visual aesthetics – the appeal of the site;
- Cost of volume products like mulch, soil, amendments, etc. will be less, but plants may not because may choose more unusual plants
- In a small space, there is not much room to hide. Consider design for everything – compost, garbage, utilities – so think about using plants + fencing as a screen, views from windows, etc.

## **TAKE THE TIME TO DO THOROUGH SITE PLANNING AND SPATIAL STUDIES**

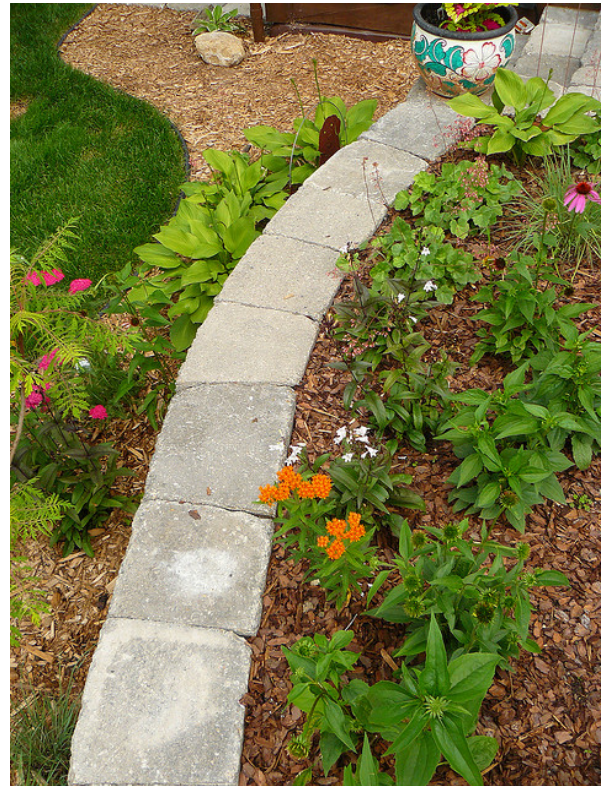
- Site analysis, bubbles, concept lines etc. equally important in small space
- Small spaces tend not to be as overwhelming as a large yard
- De-emphasize narrow spaces - use horizontal concept lines
- Use fences, walls to create hardscape enclosure;
- Use hedges for softscape enclosure
- Consider winter appearance / screening;

## PLANT SELECTION

- Plant size is critical in all landscapes, large or small
- Large plants in small spaces for canopy
- Form becomes more pronounced in smaller spaces because there are fewer plants;
- Consider selecting plant materials with persistent fruit or fruit you pick, or sterile plants to avoid heavy seeding. This will save time and the mess of fruit and seeds covering a small area;
- Use small plants in mass to feature path ways - creeping thyme, small sedum, woodland phlox, *Galium*;
- Poor plant health becomes more evident in a small space;

## PLANTS AND STRUCTURES CAN DO DOUBLE DUTY

- Rocks and Walls = seating
- Arbors, trellises, etc. = shade, privacy
- Plants with airy inflorescences = screen / scrims (Northern Gardener)
- Bird bath + water feature
- Choose plants that can be both accent and specimen throughout year
- Interplant with vegs and fruits; can place containers into garden beds
- Potager garden = vegs and herb garden
- Interplant between step stones
- Incorporate just 1-3 focal points in a small space



## BORROW VIEWS

- Extensional landscapes - neighbors, city skyline, natural view, etc. - are key from inside out and outside in.
- Borrow views
- Plants viewed close-up - Small space and close-up view - adds detail - Detail close up, but everything is close up
- Backdrops

## REMEMBER THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN: UNITY, SIMPLICITY, VARIETY, EMPHASIS, SCALE, SEQUENCE, BALANCE

- Simplicity & variety
  - Keep variety to a minimum and use small plants in combinations placed in areas viewed up close and personal;
- Unity: Repetition
  - Masses
  - color - White, silver, cream makes area look larger
  - materials - texture - Materials should fit home and style
  - avoid start-stop open areas between plants
- Scale - Maintain scale between plants, hardscape and the space overall;

## GO VERTICAL

- Espalier, topiaries, trellising, pleaching
- Raised beds, planting areas, containers
- Use dwarf and columnar forms

## TURF AREAS

Consider maintenance and whether turf is the best choice

- Radii of concept lines - mowing, repeated mowing in area
- Need for a weed whip? Not if designed properly.
- Wearing on area by mowing repeatedly

## SOME SMALL SPACE DESIGN RESOURCES

- Rice, Graham. *The Ultimate Book of Small Gardens*
- Messervy, Julie Moir and Susanka, Susan. *Outside the Not So Big House*
- Beaulieu, David. "Color Theory in Landscape Design", [http://landscaping.about.com/od/flowersherbsgroundcover1/a/flower\\_photos.htm](http://landscaping.about.com/od/flowersherbsgroundcover1/a/flower_photos.htm)
- Luss, Gunda. "Color Techniques for Landscape Design" <http://www.sustland.umn.edu/design/colortechniques.html>
- Boulden, Steve. "Big Help for Small Gardens", <http://www.the-landscape-design-site.com/smallgardens.html>