This weatherboard cottage looks pretty as a picture, thanks to the richly textured and layered garden by Cos Design. Framed by a Japanese maple and tall spikes of purple salvia (Salvia divinorum), it’s a luscious mix of deep-green and silver-grey foliage with splashes of floral colour. Turn the page for more...
Much tranquillity in my garden,’ says owner Jan. The plant palette is eclectic, with a joyous mix of shapes and textures. ‘I find so much tranquillity in my garden,’ says owner Jan.

Ten years ago, Melbourne homeowner Jan Mawson built a lovely weatherboard home for herself and her young son, modelling it on a traditional cottage. A decade later, she was finally in a position to install a front garden to complete the picture. “I was after a beautiful, inviting, meditate and relax, cocooned by plants. They approached landscape designer Ben Scott with a brief to turn their 10m x 5m north-facing side garden into a calm, contemplative space where they could read, meditate and relax, cocooned by plants. Ben came up with a novel concept: a 3.9m-diameter circular deck.

Ben Taylor of Cos Design took his design cues from the interiors of Jan’s home, which he describes as classic yet modern. Rather than a traditional symmetrical cottage garden, Steve opted for an asymmetrical design: a manicured lawn edged with neat perimeter plantings sits on one side of the garden path and a “free-form zone” on the other. The plant palette is eclectic, with a joyous mix of shapes and textures. A row of dwarf bay trees (Laurus nobilis ‘Baby Bay’) lines the front fence, forming a lovely colour contrast to a layer of silver-hued lamb’s ear. Crispily clipped spheres of coastal rosemary (Westringia) and purple salvia, the burgundy foliage of the blue chalksticks (Arthropodium) are contrasted with loose sprinklings of salvia, Lomandha species (‘Seascape’ and ‘Taraka’) and blue chalksticks (Senecio serpens). A Japanese maple (Acer palmatum) provides seasonal change while colour comes through in the winter months,” says Ben. Deciduous magnolias (Magnolia ‘Elizabeth’) provide the canopy layer over the deck, and a mid-storey of woodland style planting includes Ginkgo biloba ‘Fastigiata’ (a neat and narrow upright tree perfect for confined spaces) and a hedge of Osmanthus ‘Sublime’.

Along with these Ben planted espaliered citrus and a mix of shrubs and evergreen perennials, including Eupatorium megaspophyllum, Mellophorum, Artinopodium and Hydrangea quercifolia. Around the deck he placed stepping stones: 650mm x 650mm bluestone pavers interspersed with native violet (Viola hederacaea). A water feature made from concrete and black steel adds soothing sounds in the space. “Outdoor spaces are more inviting when they’re lush and green,” says Ben. His tips for success? “Make the space feel as enticing as possible by creating curtains of greenery,” he says. “Add canopy trees that overhang the space, or a climber that will grow on a light pergola-type structure.”


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On balance

“This garden is all about balance,” says designer Steve Taylor. The asymmetrical design echoes the home’s facade, which has a veranda on one side and a bedroom window on the other. The open lawn sits in front of the veranda while the free-form plantings provide a textured outlook for the bedroom.

The path is made from porphyry cobblestones interspersed with strips of dwarf mondo grass. The side fences are lined with Laurus nobilis ‘Milo Chois’, the front fence with a Baby Bay tree and the bluestone verandah fringed with Grevillea robusta ‘Florida’. “These green-on-green elements form a frame for the garden,” says Steve. They’re also the perfect foil for lots of silver-grey tones.
As Young inner-city parents, the owners of this Sydney home were keen to transform their open-air courtyard into a nature-filled living zone. They knew the 8m x 5m space—sitting between the house and garage—a few steps from the open-plan kitchen/living area—had the potential to play a central role in the life of their household.

Their brief to designer Richard Unsworth of Garden Life was to create an entertaining space that would give them a “sense of nature in the city” while providing a safe play area for their young daughter. The centrepiece of Richard’s design is a 4m all-in-one day bed and planter, custom-made from aluminium and clad in pine. The plant palette is a mix of natives and exotics, all hardy and lush and selected to suit the north-facing location, which is exposed to full sun in summer and semi shade in winter.

“Each of the plants was chosen for its softness, movement and wild, natural beauty,” says Richard. At one end of the planter is a coastal banksia (Banksia integrifolia) underplanted with foxtail fern (Asparagus densiflorus ‘Meyersii’), combined with strapgy plants such as walking iris (Neomarica caerulea) and lush dwarf cardamom (Alpinia nutans).

Artificial turf was the natural choice here, says Richard. “It requires minimal care and is hands and knees.” The wall is painted Porter’s Paints river Stone and covered in Boston ivy (Parthenocissus tricuspidata).

“BE BOLD WITH THE SIZES OF THE ELEMENTS IN THE SPACE; DON’T THINK SMALL JUST BECAUSE YOUR SPACE IS.”

Richard Unsworth

Garden designer Fiona Ericsson of Sticks & Stones Landscape Design was asked to revamp this side garden (right) as part of a new design in Sydney’s north. The brief? “Low maintenance, relaxed planting while maintaining a clear pathway.” In response, she has created a gentle, meandering path with informal garden beds of attention, easy-care plantings. The path is mapped out using prefab concrete steppers, each 400mm in diameter, which lead through a lush, soft carpet of kidney weed (Dichondra repens). Flanking the path are long-leafed Echium candicans, silver-leafed Helichrysum petiolare and rosemary. Boston ivy (Parthenocissus tricuspidata) creates a living wall of green and colours to red in autumn.

“In small spaces, the design rule is less is more,” says Fiona. “You don’t want to make a small space feel cluttered. Limit the materials, colours and plant textures to avoid it looking overly busy.”

Sticks & Stones Landscape Design

Having side access to your home is a wonderful thing. Not only does it provide a second, usually ground level entry point to the property, it adds to the street appeal of your home. So it makes sense to turn it into a pretty, rather than a purely pragmatic, space. Garden designer Fiona Ericson of Vivid Design have reimagined pockets of the garden around the home, including this 7m x 2.8m strip along the fence near the entry.

Working with two existing trees, a Cercis canadensis ‘Forest Pansy’ and a cabbage tree (Cordyline australis), Carolyn created a jewel-like parcel of hardy, textural plants suited to the shady location. “The aim was to diffuse the views to the street, not block them,” says Carolyn. “A heavy hedge would have dwarfed the space, so we kept it ethereal and made the architecture the hero.”

Planted around the bluestone steppers is a mix of Chinese star jasmine, Nandina ‘Gulf Stream’, Liriope ‘Elmarco’ and Arthropodium ‘Te Puna’ (New Zealand renga Lily). Carolyn says the crazy-paving driveway was shaped into curves to “draw the eye into the garden.”

Vivid Design

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Richard Unsworth

After an award-winning renovation by Cay Yiantis, this mid-century Melbourne home (above) needed a garden upgrade, too. Carolyn and Joby Blackman from Vivid Design have reinvigorated pockets of the garden around the home, including this 7m x 2.8m strip along the fence near the entry.

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CAN BE FUNCTIONAL BUT ALSO BE 'GARDENS IN SMALL SPACES LIVING, BREATHING WORKS ARE FUN TO DESIGN. THEY PURLELY VISUAL. THEY'RE OF ART.'

Nicola Cameron

create a private, inviting and beautiful Pepo Botanic Design were engaged to bare and clearly visible from the footpath.

she moved in the 5m x 9m outdoor area was front garden was a key attraction, but when this apartment, having sole access to the hot property indeed. For the new owner of its own outdoor space in Sydney’s Bondi is pastel colours to reflect the coastal location

rendered and painted in a range of sunny

timber panels to the existing fence to screen space in which to relax, lounge and dine. To achieve privacy, the designers added timber panels to the existing fence to screen the space. New garden beds were built, rendered and painted in a range of sunny pastel colours to reflect the coastal location and Miami-style Art Deco architecture.

A GROUND-FLOOR Art Deco apartment with its own outdoor space in Sydney’s Bondi is hot property indeed. For the new owner of this apartment, having sole access to the front garden was a key attraction, but when she moved in the 5m x 9m outdoor area was bare and clearly visible from the footpath.

Nicola Cameron and Eve Valensise from Pepo Botanic Design were engaged to create a private, inviting and beautiful

Here are Nicola’s tips:

In harsh environments it’s important to take cues from what is growing and thriving naturally in the area. But do some research – you don’t want to be selecting a weed.

Get to know your site and soil. Coasts do not always mean hot and dry.

Native plants thrive on the coast include:

- Coastal rosemary (Westringia): looks great in harsh, dry locations, others prefer damp shade. All have beautiful flowers.

Some love

- Carpobrotus edulis (Carpobrotus edulis): tough, vigorous groundcover. It’s perfect for a quick-growing privacy screen.
- Banksia serrata (Banksia serrata): looks great clipped into mounds; habitat for native fauna.
- Philodendron selloum sp.: tough, vigorous groundcover.
- Lomandra (Lomandra): tough, beautiful grasses that sway in the breeze.
- Banksia sp.: From groundcover to shrubs and trees, they all offer different shapes and personalities plus food for native fauna.
- Coreopsis sp. Some love hot, dry locations, others prefer damp shade. All have beautiful flowers.

Plantwise, the client wanted lush foliage spaces. Given the north-facing site and year-round coastal breezes, they also had to be tough. ‘There’s a mix of subtropical, succulent and natives in the garden beds, with cacti, grasses and herbs in the pots,’ says Nicola. Key plants include Cordyline (=) Aeonium arboreum (=) Sansevieria trifasciata (=) Sansevieria trifasciata ‘T as red’, mother-in-law’ s tongue (=) and Dianella tasmanica (=) Aeonium arboreum glauca, ‘Xanadu’, tree

Philodendron (=) Cordyline (=) Lomandra (=) Pigface (=) Lomandra (=) Peperomia (=)\n
Photography by Natalie Hunfalvay (Pepo) & Chris Warnes (Growing Rooms).

Having moved from a rural property to the city to be closer to family, the owners of this inner-Sydney property were keen to maximise their connection to the outdoors. They asked the landscapers at Growing Rooms to design a range of plant-filled spaces indoors and out, including this 3.7m x 6.9m front garden (below).

‘The aim was to create spaces where you can pause for reflection and escape the chaos of the city,’ says Growing Rooms’ director Oliver Szilagyi. ‘Each of the garden spaces is linked by the materials palette of natural stone and recycled hardwood, used repeatedly throughout.’

All the plantings at the front were chosen to complement these natural materials and suit the location, which is partially shaded most of the day. Bold tropical foliage plants form the backdrop, with a focus on textural contrasts. The plant along the front fence is a lilly pilly (Syzygium australe ‘Resilience’), perfect for a quick-growing privacy screen. Standing sentinel in the space is a Japanese maple (Acer palmatum ‘Senkaki’), chosen for its seasonal change, delicate foliage and red bark. At the base of the tree are mass-planted Philodendron ‘Xanadu’ and Pelargonium sp. They’re growing in a planter made from galvanised steel, painted with Porter’s Paints Instant Rust.

The boundary wall features dry stone cladding from Eco Outdoor, a lovely backdrop for the bed of broadleaf lady palm (Rhapis excelsa) and walking iris (Neomarica gracilis); their strappy dark-green leaves popping against the stone. Groundcovers include native violet (Viola hederacea) and mondo grass (Ophiopogon japonicus), while a large bromeliad (Acanthareia impetalis) pops out of the terracotta pot.

growingrooms.com.au
Before it was refurbished, this back garden was heavily paved, which made it feel hard, hot and uninviting. The brief to garden designer Matt Leacy of Landart Landscapes was to turn the 18m x 7.8m space into a softer, greener, more liveable space where young children could play. Matt’s redesign involved removing paving, introducing lawn and boundary plantings, building built-in seating, creating an entertaining space, gutting and refurbishing the plunge pool and — the masterstroke — adding a 7.8m x 3.5m green roof on top of the garden studio. “The green roof softens the backyard and brings in more greenery, making it feel a bit wilder and more relaxing as a space,” says Matt. “It also has the effect of extending the space beyond its border, making the backyard seem bigger than it actually is.”

The roof is mass planted with a mix of Miscanthus and Casuarina glauca, both plants with soft, graceful forms that grow to about 1.5m. They’re planted in a lightweight growing medium specially mixed by Matt and his team. “The plants have a soft, free-flowing appearance, evoking a meadow — the opposite to structural plantings, which are used to define a border. These plants help create a sense of depth.” Planted along one side of the garden is a row of slender weavers bamboo (Bambusa textilis ‘Gracilis’), a perfect choice for boundary screening, set behind a cantilevered timber bench. The lawn is Sapphire soft-leaf buffalo.

Always check the structural strength of the supporting structure. In this case Matt engaged a structural engineer to inspect the studio roof and calculate the weight it could hold.

Ensure your plans are compliant with regulations. “In most areas, a green roof will require the lodgement of a development application with the local council,” says Matt.

The roof needs to be waterproof, installed with proper drainage. To minimise maintenance, install a self-watering irrigation system.

Consider your access to the rooftop garden. This will affect the level of garden maintenance you can perform.

If you can’t commit to loads of maintenance, choose easy-care plants.
The inner-Sydney suburb of Paddington is famous for its heritage terraces with narrow gardens. Wanting to make the most of their 8.5m x 4.5m exterior space, the owners of this terrace approached landscape architect Sophie Greive from Think Outside Gardens to create a clean-lined entertaining area that would match their modern interiors.

In her design, Sophie has placed seating and planting at the perimeters of the site, to gain maximum clear space for entertaining. To compensate for a change in level, she designed a retaining wall along the higher side of the site: this doubles as a long built-in bench and backrest. “The bench seat is a semi-floating style,” says Sophie. “This creates a shadowline underneath, which gives the illusion of more space.” The seating is L-shaped to accommodate an outdoor dining table in the corner if desired. The retaining wall also creates a giant planter for a row of slender weavers bamboo (Bambusa textilis ‘Gracilis’), a great screening plant for a narrow site. Lining the opposite wall are three silver birch (Betula pendula) underplanted with New Zealand renga lily (Arthropodium cirratum). Along the rear wall are three dwarf Bull Bay magnolia (Magnolia ‘Little Gem’) and an antique scalloped-marble bowl from India.

For easy maintenance, the floor is laid with vitrified (ceramic) 600mm x 600mm tiles. And for shade, Sophie installed a fixed-post folding arm umbrella from Tropicover.

Sophie installed a cluster of pots at the back door (left) planted with (from left) elephant’s ear (Alocasia), dwarf jade (Crassula ovata compacta) and cloud-pruned juniper (Juniperus). “Different-sized pots with contrasting plants helps to finish off a space,” she says. Here are her other tips for small spaces:

+ Define your priorities
  Do you want outdoor dining at a table or casual seating? Storage or a kids’ play area?
+ Know your boundaries
  Walls and fences have more importance in small spaces. They can be painted or clad in various materials to provide a backdrop and can help to create the illusion of more space.
+ Explore shade options
  Consider an umbrella or retractable awning.

A CAREFUL SELECTION OF PLANTS PROVIDES INTERESTING FOLIAGE TEXTURES AND SHAPES IN A SYMPHONY OF GREENS.
Small spaces can possess enormous character. Take, for example, this project by Melbourne landscape designer Lisa Ellis. Faced with the challenge of a sloping site, Lisa created a series of stepped platforms descending from the rear of the home to the back fence. The result is a multilayered mix of decking and planting extending over the 10m x 15m site, including ample spaces for entertaining, seating and children’s play.

The design also incorporates plantlife in many and delightful ways, including a row of ornamental pear trees that pop up through 300mm x 300mm cutouts in the deck. “These narrow, columnar species are an excellent way to bring trees and screening into a narrow space,” says Lisa. To create a sweet seating nook, she chose a Fermob ‘Louisiane’ bench in bright green, which pops against the fence, painted Dulux Night Sky. Climbing over the fence is the self-adhering evergreen Ficus pumila – “a great plant for creating a backdrop of green when space is tight.” Planters at both ends of the seat are filled with ground-creeping ivy (Hedera) and native morning flag lily (Orthrosanthus multiflorus).

Scott’s tips for small spaces
+ Create the green layers first. Colour comes later via more foliage or flowering perennials.
+ Don’t overwork the plant palette. Keep it simple as you can add more later.
+ Know your limitations when it comes to gardening. Select plants to suit your skill level.

Mass meetings
How the look of this type of mass planting? Try the same with the following species:
+ Arthropodium cirratum (Matapouri Bay (New Zealand renga lily)).
+ Asparagus densiflorus ‘Myersii’ (non-invasive asparagus fern).
+ Liriope gigantea (giant lily turf).
+ Virginia creeper (Parthenocissus quinquefolia).

Photography by Derek Swalwell (Eckersley) and Patrick Redmond (Lisa Ellis).
THE OWNERS OF this Sydney penthouse apartment have every reason to feel on top of the world. Not only is their home – an award-winning warehouse conversion by design company SJB – blessed with unfettered city views, it also has a private, immersive garden in the sky.

The brief to landscape architect Tom Smith from Dangar Barin Smith was to create a garden for living in. “The concept was a natural, organic and wild landscape,” says Tom. The site is exposed to full sun and harsh winds, so natives were a natural choice. “The palette of highly textured natives not only suits the tough conditions, but also works well with the materiality of the architecture,” says Tom. “They soften the bold concrete walls, while helping to create a wild landscape that feels uniquely Australian.”

Key trees include coastal banksia (Banksia integrifolia), broad-leaf paperbark (Melaleuca quinquenervia) and coastal tea tree (Leptospermum laevigatum). There’s a grove of cabbage trees (Cordyline australis) and masses of native grasses, such as Pennisetum ‘Nafray’ and Lomandra longifolia ‘Katrinus’. The Pennisetum is planted on the perimeter, its feathery plumes framing the view. “It’s a hardy grass with a fine texture,” says Tom. “And beautiful when it sways back and forth in the breeze.”

The lawn is Sapphire soft-leaf buffalo, a resilient variety that requires less water than other buffalo types. H&G dangarbarinsmith.com.au

‘THE TEXTURED NATIVES HELP TO SOFTEN THE ARCHITECTURE WHILE CREATING A WILD AND UNTAMED LANDSCAPE.’ Tom Smith