

# GARDENS

COMPACT DESIGNS THAT INVITE AND DELIGHT

13 PROJECTS  
SHOWING THE  
POTENTIAL OF  
SMALL-SCALE  
SPACES

PRODUCED BY  
*Elizabeth Wilson*

Photograph by Martina Gemmola.

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...



TEXTURED AND TERRIFIC

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, seasonal entry garden,” she says. Stylistically, she wanted the 10m x 5.5m garden to be a mix of organic and formal, and was keen to incorporate pops of colour. Steve 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. Crisply clipped spheres of coastal rosemary (*Westringia*), English box and *Teucrium* are contrasted with loose sprinklings of salvia, *Lomandra* species (‘Seascape’ and ‘Tanika’) and blue chalksticks (*Senecio serpens*). A Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) provides seasonal change while colour comes through in the purple salvias, the burgundy foliage of the *Ajuga reptans* and the blue-flowering *Agapanthus* ‘Tinkerbell’. A row of gardenias fringes the verandah. “We focused on shades of green and silver-greys with white, blue and purple floral highlights,” says Steve. [cosdesign.com.au](http://cosdesign.com.au)

Photography by Martina Gemmola (Cos Design) & Ben Scott.



On balance

✦ “This garden is all about balance,” says designer Steve Taylor. The asymmetrical design echoes the home’s facade, which has a verandah on one side and a bedroom window on the other. The open lawn sits in front of the verandah 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 cobbles are laid in a jagged formation, their ‘fingers’ stretching into the grass and blurring the lines between hard and soft surfaces.

✦ The side fences are lined with *Laurus nobilis* ‘Miles Choice’, the front fence with ‘Baby Bay’ trees and the bluestone verandah fringed with *Gardenia augusta* ‘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.

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NOVEL APPROACH

WITH THREE TEENAGERS in the household, the owners of this Melbourne property were keen to create a little haven for themselves. 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. Made from merbau, the deck is designed in four segments, with planks arranged in the direction of the perimeter to form a herringbone pattern mirrored down the centre line. “As the space faces north we introduced some deciduous trees to provide summer shade while allowing light 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 *Acmena* ‘Sublime’. Along with these Ben planted espaliered citrus and a mix of shrubs and evergreen perennials, including *Eupatorium megalophyllum*, *Helleborus*, *Arthropodium* and *Hydrangea quercifolia*. Around the deck he placed stepping stones: 650mm x 650mm bluestone pavers interspersed with native violet (*Viola hederacea*). 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.” ▶ [benscott.com.au](http://benscott.com.au)



# 3

## INNER-CITY GREEN

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 strappy 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*). [gardenlife.com.au](http://gardenlife.com.au)

‘BE BOLD WITH THE SIZES OF THE ELEMENTS IN THE SPACE: DON’T THINK SMALL JUST BECAUSE YOUR SPACE IS.’ *Richard Unsworth*



## 4 Side order

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 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 attractive, 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.” [sticksandstonesld.com.au](http://sticksandstonesld.com.au)

Photography by Nicholas Watt (Garden Life), Brigid Arnott (Sticks & Stones) & Tatjana Plitt (Vivid).



## GARDEN SPECIAL H&G



## 5 Mid-century marvel

After an award-winning renovation by Coy Yiontis, 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.

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). Caroline says the crazy-paving driveway was shaped into curves to “draw the eye into the garden”. ▶ [vividdesign.com.au](http://vividdesign.com.au)

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## CITY ESCAPE

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 they can pause for reflection and escape the chaos of the city,” says Growing Rooms’ director Oliver Sizeland. “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 pilli (*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 (*Alcantarea imperialis*) pops out of the terracotta pot. ► [growingrooms.com.au](http://growingrooms.com.au)

*Living on the edge*

Coastal conditions can be challenging for gardens. 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. Coastal does not always mean hot and dry.

✦ Natives that thrive on the coast include:

– **Coastal rosemary** (*Westringia*): looks great clipped into mounds; habitat for native fauna.

– **Pigface** (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*): a tough, vigorous groundcover.

– **Lomandra spp**: tough, beautiful grasses that sway in the breeze.

– **Banksia spp**: From groundcovers to shrubs and trees, they all offer different shapes and personalities plus food for native fauna.

– **Correa spp**: Some love hot, dry locations, others prefer damp shade. All have beautiful flowers.



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## COASTAL COOL

‘GARDENS IN SMALL SPACES ARE FUN TO DESIGN. THEY CAN BE FUNCTIONAL BUT ALSO PURELY VISUAL. THEY’RE LIVING, BREATHING WORKS OF ART.’ *Nicola Cameron*



BEFORE

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 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.

Plantwise, the client wanted lush foliage species. 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 glauca*, *Philodendron* ‘Xanadu’, tree aeonium (*Aeonium arboreum*), *Dianella tasmanica* ‘Tas Red’, mother-in-law’s tongue (*Sansevieria trifasciata*) and spineless prickly pear (*Opuntia*).

The client loves to cook, so Nicola planted herbs near the built-in barbecue. “We included edible and scented plants to add to the experience of being in the garden.” [pepo.com.au](http://pepo.com.au)

Photography by Natalie Hunfalvy (Pepo) & Chris Warnes (Growing Rooms).



## 8

## RAISE THE ROOF

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. [landart.com.au](http://landart.com.au)



## Green-roof goals

- ✦ 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. ▶

Photograph by Jason Busch.



## 9 Balcony scene

Clever **border planting** has transformed this balcony in inner-suburban Sydney into a private haven screened by green. Looking out through the french doors, the streetscape is obscured by a row of maki yew pine (*Podocarpus macrophyllus* 'Maki') growing inside the property border. "It's a terrific hedge in a shadier spot, it will take full sun and is great for narrow, tight spots," says garden designer Richard Unsworth from **Garden Life**.

The large evergreen shrub grows in a column-like form up to about 3m, perfect for **screening**. On the balcony Richard has installed large terracotta pots featuring spineless prickly pear cacti (*Opuntia ficus-indica* 'Burbank Spineless') with mistletoe cactus (*Rhipsalis*) spilling over the sides. Other pots are filled with foxtail ferns (*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Meyersii'). "We've used **sculptural** yet **soft plants**, to stand out in front of the podocarpus hedge and street tree behind," says Richard. "Remember, when using two species in a pot it's important for them to have the same water requirements." [gardenlife.com.au](http://gardenlife.com.au)



Photography by Nicholas Watt (Garden Life) & Jeremy Greive (Think Outside).



### Little rules

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.

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. ▶ [thinkoutsidedgardens.com.au](http://thinkoutsidedgardens.com.au)

**A CAREFUL SELECTION OF PLANTS PROVIDES INTERESTING FOLIAGE TEXTURES AND SHAPES IN A SYMPHONY OF GREENS.**



#### 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

Love 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).

'SIMPLICITY IN THE GARDEN DOESN'T TAKE ANYTHING AWAY FROM THE HOUSE. IF ANYTHING, IT ENHANCES IT. UNDERSTATED GARDEN DESIGN IS THE KEY.' Scott Leung

Photography by Derek Swallow (Eckersley) and Patrick Redmond (Lisa Ellis).



## 11 Soft touch

The owners of this early-1900s weatherboard cottage in Melbourne wanted a simple, **neat garden** to complement their heritage home. As non-gardeners, they were keen to ensure it was low-maintenance, too.

In response, Scott Leung from **Eckersley Garden Architecture** has created a soft, textural, contemporary design front and back, using a **minimal plant palette**. The 12m x 5m north-facing front garden, which experiences full sun with dappled shade, is dominated by a single species of **native grass** (*Lomandra confertifolia* 'Little Pal'), mass-planted in thigh-high swathes fringing the recycled-brick paths. "The lomandra's an **evergreen**; it copes in tough conditions and requires little work," says Scott.

Three crepe myrtle trees (*Lagerstroemia* spp) form a pretty canopy layer. There are also sprinklings of Philippine lily (*Lilium philippinense*), *Ajuga reptans* 'Jungle Beauty', orange jessamine (*Murraya paniculata*) and sacred bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) while Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) forms a pretty covering on the verandah posts.

It's a welcoming, **low-maintenance** landscape to match the renovation by Zen Architects. [e-ga.com.au](http://e-ga.com.au)



## 12

### POSITIVE OUTLOOK

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*). ▶ [lisaellisgardens.com.au](http://lisaellisgardens.com.au)



# 13

## DIAMOND IN THE SKY

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** [dangarbarin smith.com.au](http://dangarbarin smith.com.au)



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