



GREAT *Garden design* FOR SMALL SPACES

PHOTOS AND STORY BY MELANIE REKOLA

In this day and age where countless people live in cramped residential subdivisions, many underestimate their potential for a beautiful backyard. Most would look at these postage-stamp yards as a downfall, but on the contrary there are some wonderful advantages to having a small outdoor space. The first being that your results will be almost instantaneous! Plus, your maintenance will be undemanding, and the cost less significant. Read on to ensure maximum use and impact from your small garden space.

THE DESIGN:

The Patio: Straight lines make the best use of patio space, plus feel clean and modern. Hard, straight lines are easily softened by plant materials. However, if curvature is a must, choosing gentle arching lines will maximize your usable space. While it seems contrary, large pavers can make a patio feel more spacious, especially in tight areas. To further this illusion, place pavers on the diagonal. All stone fades over time so the colour that matches today may not in years to come. Neutrals are always the best colour option as they won't overwhelm a small patio area.





Making use of a sculpture or water feature helps to create a focal point for your garden design.

Narrow-growth trees such as Emerald Cedar can fit in a tight space, soften your hard-scape and add winter interest.

Trees, Trees, Trees: All good year-round garden planning begins with evergreens and deciduous trees as it is these elements that will carry your garden through those desolate winter months. Think slender evergreen trees such as Emerald Cedar. Cedar has the wonderful benefit of being extremely malleable in pruning so it easily fits in tight spaces where privacy or a vertical element is needed. Single trunk, open habit, or small statured deciduous trees are the best choice in tight spaces. They can be easily pruned beneath to create living space and also generate a lovely ceiling effect. I adore Eastern Redbud, Pin Oak, and Sunburst Honey Locust.

High Impact Shrubs and Perennials: The grouping of shrubs and perennials is always a good approach as it gives the eye a rest before moving on to the next texture or colour. Long blooming Little Lamb hydrangea and repeat blooming Bloomerang dwarf lilac are good shrub options. For perennials, repeat blooming daylilies and the incredible long/repeat blooming Orion Cranesbill are fine selections. Consider choosing a strategically placed larger specimen shrub/small tree such as Betty Magnolia or Summer Gold Corna Kousa Dogwood in a part of the garden that can be hidden. Gardens are meant to be explored, therefore a bit of mystery lends to a space feeling larger.

Don't Forget The Vines: Another way to maximize vertical elements without sacrificing precious living space is by planting vines. Consider the large-leafed "Dutchman's Pipe" to mask an unsightly wall or fine textured Trumpet Vine to train up your latticework. I always say, "when you need a quick fix, plant a vine." Sadly, they are much underused and are often forgotten in a garden altogether.

Focal Point: A focal point such as a garden sculpture or water feature can be just the thing to punch up the wow factor and make a little yard seem more spacious. Perhaps some ornamental boulders placed randomly throughout the garden would be appropriate, which can double as a casual seating spot or make-shift table.

TIPS AND BEYOND

Play With Perspectives: Perspectives can do much to make a petite space feel bigger. Give the illusion of depth by placing large-leafed/brightly coloured plants towards the entry and cool tones/fine textures towards



the back. Try a specimen or grouping of the trendy and mysterious black plants in a far corner, such as Black Lace Elder or Purple Emperor Sedum.

Use All Land: Consider making use of your front or side yard. Installing a seating area/garden in these places is an efficient utilization of space. The trick to making these open areas feel comfortable is to provide the proper privacy needed. Plant materials, a screen or a combination of both are the tools needed to achieve this. Maximize useable space and forgo lawn altogether, if possible. Lawn only looks good "en masse" plus it's useless and high maintenance to have chopped up bits of lawn scattered here and there.

Keep It Simple, Stupid: Continuity will be achieved by composing a small plant list and using repetition. Be stringent with plant choices and sow only what has at least two of these attributes listed: interesting bark, attractive leaves, berries, flowers, seed pods, fall colour, appealing texture and form. A common mistake many make is to choose upon flower alone. Choosing the multiple attributes listed will ensure your garden's beauty throughout the seasons.

On a less serious note, spring is here! In Canada, our season is short and time precious. Do your due diligence and plan now. You can get to the fun parts faster. Then off to the nursery with you! **OH**