

L a n d s c a p e a n d G a r d e n D e s i g n

Good morning to you all, thank you very much for being here today. Caryl asked me to speak to you a little about landscape and garden design, which I shall endeavour to do. It is an enormous subject, especially when you look at the history of garden design and the impact it has had for generations - it has had a huge role to play in our understanding of cultures and civilisations from thousands of years ago. I'm going to try to keep it a little simple, and hopefully make pertinent points that will help all of you in your own gardens today, touching on a few big ideas too.

1. What is Landscape and Garden Design?

When we think about landscape and garden design, we may have a romantic, rather glamorous notion of celebrities in wonderful hats waltzing round Chelsea flower show drinking pimm's and eating strawberries, or you may have in mind the other end of the spectrum with public amenity landscaping - car parks, corporate developments and the like. Landscape and garden design incorporates both of these and everything inbetween!

At it's simplest garden design is thinking things through - planning, looking at possibilities and deciding on what style or look you are going for, and then deciding how to make these fit into the context and give you the functional value that you require. Basically the very first step of design is knowing what you are trying to achieve - or setting a goal for your garden. This final goal can take weeks or years to achieve, timescale is not important - what is important is having a plan and sticking to the core components to ensure a harmonious design is eventually achieved.

While descriptions such as "formal," "informal," or "cottage" are often heard, in reality they can only ever be broadly descriptive terms; categorising gardens is fraught with difficulties, not least because each one is different. They are far more useful as general guidelines providing overall direction and "feel" rather than being seen as hard and fast rules. Good garden design is as much an instinctive art as it is a formulaic science. Basically designing your garden should be a creative and fun exercise, but leave you with a functional, beautiful, life enhancing space.

2. Why is design important - what role does it play.

Designing a garden doesn't just mean creating a pretty thing to look at outside! Rather it will open up a whole realm of possibilities to you. When you plan your garden to incorporate eating, socialising, relaxation, exercise, child play areas, retreats, secret sun spots to sunbathe or shady mounds to read a book, you can really enhance your lifestyle. A friend of mine once laid out a long mound of earth on one side of his swimming pool and literally lay on the earth shaping and moulding it to get it to exactly the right angle of comfort for sunbathing, and then grew lawn over it! It was practical, a little quirky and everyone loved it! On a practical front you can increase your security using good design, clever lighting and choosing the right plants. Studies have also shown that sorting your garden out can increase the sales potential of your house by up to 13%!! The point being that taking the time to design and think your garden through will not only save you lots of time and money, but will enhance your life.

3. Starting out on your own garden; where to begin.

Firstly don't be overwhelmed - this is not rocket science and the most important things you need are lots of enthusiasm and patience! The first step in the process is to get to know your garden. Spend time in it, watch it change over the seasons, take photographs and make notes about what you see, or would like to do in certain areas. Think about the surrounding landscape, borrowed vistas and what you can do to make your garden fit. Do you live in a mountainous wet area, or do you have aloe for neighbours? What is the natural flora like, what grows well in next door gardens and which hard landscaping materials are used locally - what is the local rock type, what is the soil like, how much rainfall is there? Make records - you may forget where the sun was during last July! These facts all show what your garden context is - how your garden fits into the landscape around it. Understanding context enables us to understand the feeling of a space - or what we call *genius loci* - in simple terms the spirit of a place. There is often a feeling of peace in the landscape or when we get into nature away from the rat race, but have you ever felt a sudden fear - in the woods or in a remote place, where you suddenly feel uneasy, your heart starts to race? Do you have places where you love to retreat to in your garden because of a sense of safety, or comfort? Do you have spaces that make you feel free and uninhibited? Others where you feel exposed, or vulnerable? Where is your most peaceful spot? Where do you go to hide or for solitude? And where do your kids go to play - is it often hidden away in a secret fort? All these give you an idea of what the spirit of your garden is, and you can then use this

to develop a design concept. Understanding the spirit of a site will help you to develop a garden that has special meaning for you and for those who visit it.

All the time that you are away from your garden is time to collect inspiration, look at the landscape around you - take note of how different spaces make you feel. What's the difference between parking at TM and sitting at the plot having a relaxing cup of coffee? Apart from the obvious try to recognise physical features that invoke an emotional response. All the while take photographs, plagiarise other people's ideas and borrow from nature!

4. Site survey, analysis and appraisal. Existing trees, location (context), micro-climates.

Now that you know your garden intimately you can begin to the all important, often overlooked survey analysis and appraisal stage! Measure your garden accurately and then start the site survey. Include all the information you have collected such as where the sun rises and sets, which way is north, where the wind blows in from, where it's channelled and where you get the best cool summer breeze? What type of soil do you have - no really, have you tested it? Have you dug it over yourself? Are there worms and bugs in there? Jot down notes on the location and the borrowed landscape - do you have a spectacular vista that needs to be maximised when you start the design, is there a tree in your neighbour's garden that you wish to incorporate or borrow as a focal point? Put it on the survey plan! Once you have established the basics such as access points, microclimates and considered what is existing you will have a clearer picture in your head of what you need to do.

Don't forget to check where your utility points, septic tanks, and borehole pipes run. Practical things to consider BEFORE starting your design are access to; lighting, irrigation, drainage, vehicular access, earth removal, waste, water collection, existing mature trees and shrubs that you wish to retain, compost heaps, etc.

Now you can begin to make notes, jot down ideas, collect inspiring articles or photos, and allow yourself time to think outside the box - give yourself total creative freedom as you begin the design process.

5. Beginning the design process - Functionality. Practical starting points. Making the space useable and personal to you.

Consider what you want to use your garden for.. and be honest! Do you mostly need an outside space to impress? Blue LED lighting, hot tub, and crisp modern lines? Sleek stainless steel water features, or a place to display art? Do you require additional entertainment space? Do you need a child play area? Are you trying to be self-sustainable and grow all your own fruit and veg? Do you need place for your dog to play/ to keep chickens etc. Make a list of every practical function you want your garden to fulfill - and allow yourself the headspace to dream about what you'd love to have in your life. Be creative, let your imagination run wild - whether it's a hammock to have your afternoon doze, or a wild swimming pool where the tadpoles eat your toes, anything is possible - you just have to dream it up first!

Once you have your list of functions, start to sketch - nothing complicated, just basic ideas of where these functions would ideally happen. Draw bubbles in different colours, play around - see what spaces can be used for multiple functions. Plan your garden on paper and don't be afraid to change your mind before you come up with the final layout. You can do five or six different layout plans, play with functions and experiment - then think each plan out carefully and amalgamate what you love about each.

Another consideration is your performance in the garden - how much do you put in? Do you mulch, feed and deadhead? Do you stake before your plants topple over? If we are honest 99% of us could up our game on some of these fronts. So don't commit to something that seems a burden, a chore, or makes you feel despondent or bad about yourself. Don't beat yourself up about it - just be honest at this point and a little self-indulgent!

6. Style and Developing concepts - where to start and how concepts evolve. Inspiration, using all the senses and allowing your imagination to run riot!

So we now know what functions we want our garden to deliver and we can start to consider style and aesthetics. Take inspiration from your home and the way you have decorated it - it is often important to consider the type of house and the setting to avoid a finished product which sits uneasily in its surroundings. Decide what sort of garden you want - a clean, simple, formal very neat and tidy garden? Or do you want blousy borders and curvy beds with hidden nooks to get lost in perennials. Do you love Japanese gardens, and incorporate feng shui principles into your home? Try to visit as many different gardens as you can, and spend time in them. Does that modern look that you might have thought a bit dull actually give you a feeling

of peace and tranquility? Does the soft, blooming country garden make you reminisce about childhood? Gardens are intensely personal, so explore the styles and ideas that you love - the magazines you buy, music, art and even people... anything can be a source of inspiration!

The concept design shows the main ideas and types of planting, together with materials. a holistic approach is key: so many gardens are fragmented and can look rather like patchwork quilts, while well considered spaces have that easy sense of cohesion and harmony without looking obviously designed.

Start to think of all your senses - scents, sounds that can be incorporated (sometimes almost invisibly), touch and texture and of course taste.

Vertical structures, changes in levels and creating journeys can all make your garden more interesting.

7. Materials

SIMPLICITY and REPETITION are usually key to ensure you have that harmonious cohesive feel. This is particularly important when choosing materials, a maximum of 3 hard landscaping materials is advisable. Plant groups should also be repeated - going for a planting list a mile long will just make it look thrown together and disjointed - you need a plan, and once you've made it stick to it!

8. Budget

This is crucial for the success of your garden. Don't turf your lawn if you know your budget is tight - use runners. Don't spend a fortune on flower show trinkets - or trendy pots, when in two years they will look outdated. Plants can be propagated, grown from seed - or just take cuttings. Don't skimp on the important bits - such as the hard landscaping materials that will make or break your entire design, lighting, features, or things that will irk and irritate. If you can't afford everything right now, then do the basics well. If you have an unlimited budget then think carefully about what you want your garden to achieve, don't impulse buy and then try to fit things in to the plan - you will end up with chaos and clutter. Important things to think about are the finish of any building works, your boundaries, and structures. Wobbly willow weave panels may look quirky and country chic now, but in six months time when they are rotten and collapsed it will just be irritating and you will have to start again.

9. Plants and plant selection - designing with plants. Getting inspiration from nature.

The fun begins! Your planting plan can begin once you have a solid sketch design of what you want to achieve on the ground. You have decided on shapes, proportion and verticality, and your soil and micro-climate will determine what plants will grow where. Don't get carried away in the garden centre looking at plants that are in flower or catch your eye - rather use your knowledge, and get advice if you aren't sure.

Stick to your colour scheme and remember to consider the lifespan of the plants, and eventual size. If your plant selection is based on what you see flowering in March - then you are going to have a long year of boredom waiting for your month of blossom! Try to extend the flowering season by getting staggered displays of colour, get hard working plants that perform twice a year, aim for something to be in bloom in every month and don't rush your purchasing. If what you want isn't in stock - wait a while, or take cuttings from a friend. Choose plants for foliage interest, not just blossom. Remember you need structural staples, evergreens and various foliage shape and colours to create really interesting beds.

Try to ignore both impulse buys and fashion - often these underperform and don't fit in. And again, seek inspiration from places you visit, the natural landscape around you etc.

10. Child friendly gardens

Getting children involved in your garden can be hugely beneficial to their lives. Gardens encourage kids to use their own imaginations and make up games. We live in a culture of constant entertainment, marketing and commercialism being pushed onto us - so allow your kids the space they need to just play, and be inventive at home. This helps to develop their imaginations, figure out social structures, and make their own discoveries without being frightened. Living willow sculptures, secret caves/meeting places, teepees covered in vines, bird feeders, succulent garden, bug hotel, roof garden on top of bird feeders, mud monsters etc. Custom made blackboard wall for them to draw on. Games, and picnic spots for them to have their own tea parties! Get them their own gardening tools and help them plot and plan what they want to grow. Let them get dirty, make a mess and just be free to learn and explore.

11. Herbs and vegetables, composting, the use of pesticides and herbicides. Sustainable approach.

Be practical - put your herbs and veggies where you will USE them! It's no good having a herb garden if it's a trek from the kitchen! Grow things that are expensive to buy but also taste much much nicer fresh - such as fresh salad leaves.

Make your herb and veg garden beautiful - somewhere you enjoy to spend time. Don't just do a couple of rows at the bottom of the garden in an unsightly fashion! Give your veg garden some love and remember you can also grow your veg amongst your flowers.

Every gardener should have a compost heap, if for no other purpose than that it's a free source of goodness for your garden! You can compost nearly all your leftover food scraps and green waste from the garden saving landfill, and in the process create a delicious mulch for your own garden. There is no reason not to!

Think carefully about what pesticides and herbicides you use - clever planting and using organic products will ensure you are getting only goodness from what you eat, as well as benefitting the environment. It's no use spraying general pesticides when you kill all the good bugs too. Interestingly with organic gardening research has shown that you can actually have a better control on damaging pests if you have a healthy ecosystem and reduce the risk of infestation.

Going on from herbs and vegetables I wanted to discuss the culture of gardening, permaculture and the benefits of gardening.

12. Community gardening, permaculture, guerilla gardening and how these approaches are changing lives in inner cities. Food deserts, changing our approach.

Caryl asked me to speak a little of culture, and I wanted to discuss the culture of gardening and permaculture. It is becoming painfully obvious that there is a culture of consumption created by the global market economy which cannot sustain itself on a planet with finite resources. Scientists may argue how long we have until we reach a point of no return, but all agree that it is inevitable if we continue down the current path. Alternative options are being explored already by communities who want a shift in beliefs and practices - or a cultural shift.

There are many communities who are getting actively involved. Changing the world starts with one small step, and often many people doing something small can make a huge difference. Permaculture is not a new idea, the term was coined in the 70's. Permaculture has three core values. Firstly to respect the Earth, recognise that the earth is our only finite source of all life, and that we are a part of the system - not separate to it. Secondly there is Peoplecare which is simply supporting and helping each other to change to ways of living that are not harming ourselves or the planet, and to develop healthy societies. Lastly there is Fairshare - or limiting consumption - ensuring that our resources are utilised in ways that are equitable and wise.

There are various community gardening cultures out there too, and this approach is changing lives in inner cities. People have started to claim back waste land - whether it is the grassy pavements or empty plots of land. Guerilla gardening is taking places such as London by storm - people go out in the middle of the night and transform a roundabout in a run down neighbourhood, or a road verge overnight. The beauty this brings to people's lives changes attitudes, and makes people care about their neighbours and their surroundings.

There is an elemental benefit to gardening, to improving your surroundings, and being a part of a community that grows and shares it's produce. Community gardens provide fresh produce and plants as well as satisfying labor, neighborhood improvement, sense of community and connection to the environment. Why not plant fruit trees as street trees? Why not grow veg and medicinal herbs along our streets? It is a sad reflection on our society that many people's first question to this not so novel concept is "Won't people steal your food?" But that's the point, if everyone has a vested interest, if everyone gets involved, then no - no one cares who has a broccoli, or a carrot. The point is that those who can't afford plants may provide labour, those who can't offer labour may be able to water, or offer support and a chat. And those that come and pick without any contribution are welcome to it - there is a generosity of spirit to this concept that is sorely lacking in almost any other sphere of life.

So perhaps as part of our garden and landscape design culture, we can begin to shift our thinking to encompass our neighbourhoods and public spaces and most importantly, we can begin to embrace our communities and really impact each other's lives.