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## How To Landscape Patios And Small Gardens

By Bill Watson

Due to the small area available to some homeowners and apartment dwellers, patios and small gardens may seem like a challenge to landscape.

What follows are a few simple tips and strategies designed to maximize space, and help you create a lush and vibrant outdoor living area.

### Container Gardening

Examine your patio or small garden, and you will probably see nothing but straight lines and right angles.

One trick used by professional landscapers is to "soften" these lines, or "round" the corners with vines or trees grown in large containers and placed tightly against walls, in corners, or at the edge of patios.

A good rule of thumb is the old adage, "There are no straight lines in nature". While many people may enjoy a more formal or symmetrical landscape, small gardens tend to benefit from a more natural, less structured design.

Both large and small, containers come in a wide variety of shapes, colors, and designs. By placing a small tree, vine, or flowering shrub, planted in a large container in a corner, and placing around it a variety of smaller plants in pots and containers, you can create a multi-tiered effect with a great deal of texture and color.

In addition, you can achieve the same affect along walls or the edge of a patio.

Imagine a painters canvas, taller objects will stand in the background with progressively shorter objects working their way into the foreground. This creates a sense of depth, and in smaller gardens this can give the illusion of more depth than actually exists.

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One method used to create this illusion of depth, is to employ plants with darker foliage (greens or purples) in the background and place plants with multi-colored, or variegated leaves ("variegated" is a horticultural term for plants who's leaves naturally possess more than one color), or brightly colored flowers in the foreground.

Vines, grown in a large container, and trained to cover walls or a trellis, will allow you to cover large areas of your "canvas" and still maximize space in smaller gardens or patios. This will also serve to soften, the rigid box-like feel of smaller areas.

Also, a small, self-contained fountain, waterfall or pond placed against walls, or in corners, can become a focal point, or point of interest from which to build out from.

Low growing plants with multi-colored foliage (variegated), are excellent choices for small gardens. These types of plants, many possessing leaves with striking reds, creams, and pleasant shades of green all on a single leaf, can add interest, variety, and texture to areas where they are planted.

Many plants referred to as "house-plants" will have variegated foliage or interesting flowers. Most house-plants are native to tropical or semi-tropical regions of the world and in warm-winter areas will do well outside year-round.

Most house-plants tend to be shade-loving and so do best in shade gardens or beneath larger plantings. In regions with heavy frost or snow, you will need to bring the plant indoors until the weather warms again.

Dwarf varieties of trees are an excellent choice for large pots or ground planting in small gardens.

There are literally hundreds of fruiting or flowering dwarf varieties available to the home gardener. Many will also possess leaves with interesting shapes, patterns, or colors, that are sure to add interest and variety to any landscape.

**Patio Trees:** The term, Patio Tree, is used to describe trees that are generally small, as trees go, and are also quite attractive at close range. Their branches will not shed annoying quantities of leaves, or drop messy fruit that will litter, or stain patio surfaces.

In addition, all will have "tame" root systems that do well in large containers, or if planted in the ground will not crack pavement or greedily take water and nutrients from surrounding plants.

Finally, fragrant herbs and low-growing plants with colorful flowers make good choices for containers in small gardens. (e.g., Gardenias, Lavender, Jasmine).

### Tips on planting in containers

When planting in containers, remember that the root system, cannot search beyond the container for food and water. This means the plant will be totally dependent on the nutrients and water you provide.

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Remember to always use a good quality potting soil, and add an appropriate amount of granulated or slow-release fertilizer when planting.

All plants grown in containers will over time, need an application of a good quality liquid fertilizer. Also, when planting in containers, pack the potting soil in tightly to ensure there are no air pockets, or voids that could harm the roots.

Finally, always choose a container with drainage holes in the bottom. Without good drainage, fertilizer salts will build up in the soil and can then harm the plant.

Container gardening is an excellent way to maximize space, and enliven small gardens or patios.

A wide array of plants suitable for container culture are available to the home gardener, and with a little care and planning are sure to enrich any outdoor living space.

The types of patio trees available to you will depend upon which area or region of the country you live in. Some options include:

Acer (Maple): Patio types are: *Acer buergerianum* (Trident Maple), *A. circinatum* (Vine Maple), *A. davidii* (David's Maple), *A. palmatum* (Japanese Maple).

*Lagerstroemia Indica* (Crepe Myrtle): with attractive foliage and large clusters of flowers that can range in color from pink to cranberry to a deep or hot red depending upon variety.

Magnolias: available in many regions both hot and cool, have showy displays of tulip to saucer-shaped flowers with a wide selection of colors.

Prunus: (Flowering Cherry) (Flowering Plum).

Dwarf Citrus: such as lemon, lime or orange, make good additions to small gardens and tend to hold their fruit for many months.

Good Luck and Happy Gardening!

With over 20 years of gardening and landscaping experience, Bill now shares his tips and advice on creating and maintaining lush and healthy home gardens. Visit his website at

<http://www.your-healthy-gardens.com/>

### **Adding Beauty To Your Garden With An Arbor**

**By Paul Graham**

Garden arbors are set up as shaded places in home gardens or public parks where one can relax and

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rest. These open frameworks are typically made of latticework or rustic work, functioning also as a trellis for climbing or creeping plants. Arbors can also be constructed for decks or patios. Today's garden arbors were not the first attempt to enhance the beauty of gardens. In the 400s B.C. and A.D. 400's, elaborate courtyards were a hallmark of many Roman homes. Landscape architecture was also given a premium in Japanese gardens (A.D. 500's) and Persian gardens (A.D.200's–600's). Beauty was also a priority for civic plazas and hillside estates for Italians in the 1400's–1500's. City gardens and majestic palaces were the highlight of France during the 1600's and 1700's, while country estates with a natural look were the main theme followed by English designers in the 1800's.

### 1. Landscape Architecture

For a good number of these early country estates and gardens, designers were known as landscape gardeners. An American – Frederick Law Olmsted – was the first to use 'landscape architect'. He indicated this title when he approved design plans for Manhattan's Central Park in New York City with Calvert Vaux as his partner in the 1850's. Landscape architecture is not limited to major projects. Some homeowners tap the services of professionals to add beauty to their gardens. However, others now feel confident in do-it-yourself projects as a cost-effective alternative to make their gardens beautiful.

### 2. Use Quality Materials

Creating a small garden arbor is an easy task, with costs becoming significantly less if the homeowner is patient enough to shop around and compare prices, particularly for pressure-treated lumber. Other items that may vary slightly across discount stores in price terms are deck screws, scrap lumber, crushed stone or gravel, washers, bolts and nuts. The same principles apply to building larger arbors, although some ideas and items would tend to increase in scale. As an example, using two posts for a small arbor may mean using four posts for a large one, as a bigger arbor would need greater support for strength and stability, and also to enhance alignment.

### 3. Designing a Garden Arbor: Some Do-It-Yourself Fundamentals

– To stabilize the arbor, the homeowner should have the main posts of the structure sunk into concrete poured into holes below the garden's ground level.

– The carpenter's level is used to determine if the posts stand at equal heights. The tool is also used to establish plumbness, or if the posts are vertically 'level.'

– Wooden crosspieces in varying measurements can be attached perpendicular to the posts for further support.

– Since some rejects still make their way to lumber stores, one should be patient enough to sort through many boards until a good quality board is found.

– Buyers should remember that conventional measurements are not exact: a 4 by 4 may actually

measure 3.5 by 3.5, while 2 by 4 may measure 1.5 by 3.5.

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– The same consideration for post height must also be given, as part of the arbor posts will be underground. Galvanized post anchors is one option homeowners have if they intends to make use of the post's full height – or have all posts above ground level – for their garden.

### 4. Tools For Do-It-Yourself Projects

These will actually cost a lot more if one does not have the necessary tools at home for building garden arbors.

– Circular saw or handsaw – Stepladder – Wheelbarrow – Hammer – Wrench – Spade bit – Garden hose – Carpenter's level – Shovel – Drill – File – Wood chisel

### 5. Building Tips

– Arbor boards can already be pre-drilled and pre-cut as a time-saving step.

– The wooden crosspieces can be designed at the ends. Patterns can be drawn using a pencil and later cut using a jigsaw.

For more great garden arbor related articles and resources check out

<http://arbors.lawnngardens.com>



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