

Ask the DESIGNER

Each month we help sort out a reader's problem garden with clever advice from the best experts in the garden design world

Q We're extending our house into our garden. How can we make up for the loss of outdoor space? *Becky Jackson, Surrey*

A "I WAS GIVEN A VERY SIMILAR CHALLENGE BY SOME CLIENTS following an extension to their Victorian house. It extended out and across their side return, significantly reducing the size of their garden," says garden designer Tim Mackley (timmackley.co.uk).

Tim's brief was to create a garden that made the best of the remaining space, complemented the modern interior, provided a private place to sit out and entertain and was full of lush planting. "The clients weren't particularly keen on keeping the grass, and getting rid of a lawn can allow you to do a lot more in a small space," Tim says.

* Long strips of planting

A key part of the new design was to introduce two new wide borders to partially cross the garden. They take the eye across the garden rather than straight up and down, giving the garden more width and depth. "With small gardens, I try to avoid using small borders, which can look boring," says Tim. "Wider borders give the garden more depth so you can't see the whole of the garden in one view, meaning you have to move around and explore it."

As the borders partially conceal the end of the garden, they also fool the eye into thinking the garden is longer than it is. "It's important that a small garden doesn't feel cramped and there's plenty of room to move around," Tim explains.

"The proportions for each element should be relative to each other and be adequate for its specific function. For example, the patio provides plenty of space to move around the table and chairs, and the 1.2m gravel path is wide enough that two people can pass on it."

"When planning a patio, it's always worth considering in advance the size of your table and the number of people to be seated around it. A good rule of thumb is to allow a minimum depth of 2.4m for a table for four and 3m for a table for six."

* Light-toned paving

Large, buff grey, sawn sandstone tiles were chosen for the patio, helping to give a sense of spaciousness. Tim explains: "They complement the internal flooring, giving a clean, crisp, modern feel. And, because it is a sunny, south-facing garden, they bounce a lot of light around, which helps to make the space feel lighter, brighter and bigger."

Beyond the patio is a flint gravel area, separated by another section of sandstone paving. A second area of gravel completes the layout, finishing at a raised bed. Tim explains: "Repetition of the two materials — paving and gravel — helps to give more cohesion to the garden. A trick with a small garden is not to use too many materials, or it can look fussy."



The garden was all lawn and little else and in need of modernising

TIP Using horizontal lines in a small garden will trick the eye into thinking it's bigger than it is

"Go for two ideally, three would be the maximum, repeating them if necessary. Using too many materials can make a garden look very fussy."

* Slatted fencing

The new bespoke cedar fencing close to the house was chosen to give a modern look and the horizontal lines of the slats help draw the eye down the garden, making it appear longer than it is. Pretty star jasmine climbing plants, with white scented flowers in summer and glossy green leaves throughout the year, will eventually grow up them to help make the garden feel more private.

* Dramatic plants

Emphasis has been placed on evergreens and attractive foliage. Big, bold and architectural-style plants such as honey bush and bush flax add a touch of drama to the garden, while smaller perennials such as lily turf are repeated through the borders to pull the scheme together.

In the beds closest to the house, plants that provide pops of colour at different times of the year were selected, including lavender, silver bush, sedum 'Autumn Joy', agapanthus and Mexican fleabane.



TIM MACKLEY, GARDEN DESIGNER

"With a small garden, less is more. Don't try to fit too much in."

Easy ways to get the look

- 1 FENCING** Try Venetian Fencing Panel, H&W1.83m, £112.14 jacksons-fencing.co.uk
- 2 POTS** For similar, try 60cm Poly-Terrazzo White Tall Cube Planter, £99/2 primrose.co.uk
- 3 PLANTS** Star jasmine £29.99/5L primrose.co.uk; Bush flax £24.99/2L rhsplants.co.uk; Mexican fleabane £5.99/9cm pot crocus.co.uk
- 4 GRAVEL** Try Flint Gravel 20mm/0.5 tonne, £166 pavingsuperstore.co.uk
- 5 PAVING TILES** Try Kandla Grey Indian Sandstone, from £16/1m² stone-traders.co.uk
- 6 TABLE AND CHAIRS** For similar, try 1.2m Teak Octagonal Folding Table with 4 chairs, £770 sustainable-furniture.co.uk

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