

# INSIDE OUT

The concept of garden rooms may seem a recent one, fueled by our modern suburban quest for natural living. But it's actually a lifestyle that goes back hundreds of years, to the great Italian, French and English estates with fountain gardens, kitchen gardens, yew hedges and boxwood borders.

But you need not reside in a palatial estate to create garden rooms in your own yard, regardless of how modest it may be. The concept works well around any size and style of home, provided you follow a few basic principles to get started:

## Your home's style inside and out

Garden rooms, correctly designed, reflect the character of the home they adorn—not just the exterior elements, but interior design cues. That's the key to blending the indoors with the outdoors.

The biggest challenge is creating a garden that doesn't conflict with the style of your home. So you first need to determine the architectural style of the house. Is it a quaint cottage, an elegant Victorian, a simplistic Prairie style or an angular contemporary? Next, consider its size, as well as the size and layout of the interior: Is it large and sprawling, with an open floor plan? Or compact, with small, cozy rooms?

- *Cottage-style homes:* They're generally small and informal. They lend themselves to loose materials, such as gravel or stone paths, and free-flowing perennial beds and borders. Garden rooms can be small, intimate and meandering. Rustic siding and roofing materials indicate similarly rustic hardscape materials.
- *Victorian homes:* They're bold and detailed. The gardens should reflect a similar style, emphasizing ornate, painted woodwork, colorful flowers and decorative accessories, such as topiaries.
- *Prairie homes:* These are simplistic in design and execution, with an emphasis on natural materials and blending into their setting.



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made class on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.



Lines are straight, patterns are repeated. Strive for the same simplicity of design, line and pattern in the garden, with natural-looking hardscape materials, such as native stone.

- *Modern/contemporary homes:* They often have grand entries and foyers, high ceilings and open floor plans, including great rooms for entertaining. Gardens should be just as open, airy and inviting, its hardscape materials equally contemporary.

## Look inside your home

- *Flooring materials.* Repeating colors, textures and patterns outside will reinforce the idea that your gardens are an extension of your home. Brick and tile can be used outside easily, or mimicking the herringbone pattern in a wood floor can be done with stone.
- *Lines of site.* Garden rooms are often centered on the views through windows and doors, so look through the windows to see where you might center your outdoor rooms. Don't always stand in the center of a window or doorway; sometimes the most common viewing point is a favorite chair or even from another room in the house.

## Your neighborhood

Just as your home's style probably fits with other homes in your neighborhood, the gardens surrounding your home should fit in, too. If you design according to your home's architecture, you're halfway there. But don't view your property lines as your garden's

border. Instead, consider the surrounding yards and property:

- Are there unsightly views you want to block? Now is the opportunity to screen them.
- Are there pleasant vistas you want to preserve? A series of pillars or an open trellis can frame the view while still providing a sense of enclosure.

#### Your desires

Now for the fun part: What are your wants? What do you envision in your garden rooms? A pond? A perennial bed? A barbecue? A patio? A fountain? A birdfeeder? A vegetable garden? A play area?

Next, ask yourself for more details about what you want from each of those choices. This will help you design each garden room for its purpose.

- *I want a barbecue* could mean I want a space where I can barbecue while hanging out with my buddies. So maybe you want space enough for comfortable chairs and electricity for listening to the game on the radio.
- *I want a pond* could mean I want to hear the sound of water. Or I want to create a natural habitat to attract wildlife, which might mean a large pond surrounded by native plantings and set in a space where the animals can be viewed from the house without disturbing them.
- *I want a patio* could mean I want a place to have outdoor dinner parties: space and seating to accommodate guests, lighting for nighttime parties and maybe protection for all-weather entertaining.

#### Putting your ideas on paper

Take heart if you can't draw a straight line. You don't have to be an artist to design your garden rooms. In fact, you don't need straight lines. But you do need a master plan, even if you can afford only to put in a few trees this season.

Use commercially available computer programs or just pencil and paper. The idea is to begin to establish the placement and scale of your rooms in relation to your home.

- You should have a plan of your house. It shows your property and the outline of the buildings. Make large photocopies of it so you can do lots of sketching and tossing.
- Grab a pencil and begin sketching loose circles in various areas of the yard—at the front door, the back door, where you want the play yard—to indicate rough placement of your garden rooms. (Yes, some rooms may end up as rectangles, but for now the circles are an easy way to place them.) Don't worry about being neat; now is the time to be loose and free.

- Think about the views from windows and doors. Use a ruler to draw centerlines to indicate lines of site. This will assist you in placing entries, exits and focal points.
- Ignore existing lines formed by sidewalks, driveway edges, patios and decks. Let your circles intersect and flow across them. This will create much more interest in your gardens than staying within prescribed boundaries. For instance, a front garden can encompass both sides of the driveway, softening hard lines.
- Next, sketch in more detailed room shapes and lines: squares, rectangles and curves. Show places where the shapes intersect the pathways between the rooms.
- Now you can place details: garden furniture, ornamentation, specimen plants. Think in terms of how you would sketch a room in your home, placing a sofa, table and lamp.

#### Defining the rooms

Most people assume that the walls of a room are what define it, but for garden rooms, a better starting point is with the floor.

- *Floors:* Many rooms (indoors or out) have no walls at all; they're simply a different type of flooring material. Think area rugs in your house and how they can define a sitting area within a larger family room. Your flooring, be it turf, mulch, gravel, pavement, bricks or board, are an important key to setting the mood of each room, just as wood, tile and carpet set the mood indoors.
- *Hedges:* Traditional hedges, both tall and short, will define rooms. Options are formally trimmed vs. loose and natural and evergreen vs. deciduous. A hedge doesn't have to be just one variety of plant, either.
- *Fences.* Don't just think of the typical privacy fence. And don't just think straight lines. Fences can be high or low, long or short, private or open, formal or curving, ornate or rustic, painted or natural, wood or stone.
- *Doors.* Just as entry to a room in your home may be the transition between hardwood and carpet, the door from one garden room to the next might be a change from brick pavers to gravel. Other transitions include a gap in a planting; the junction of two converging planting beds; a pair of pillars or urns; a traditional arched trellis; or two large container plants. They can be gated or open.
- *Windows.* Leaving lines of site from one room to another, or across many rooms creates interest and prevents claustrophobic feelings. Be sure each line of site ends with a focal point: a plant, a fountain, a piece of art or another doorway into yet another garden room. A gap in a hedge and a circular hole in a fence are just two examples.
- *Plants.* Finally! Interestingly, it's the last detail many landscape architects worry about. During the design process, you need to consider plants in terms of shape, size and texture. It's only near the end of the process that you need to worry about what species you need for what location. ✍

—By Chris Beytes, with special thanks to landscape architect John Staab, a 22-year veteran of The Brickman Group, one of America's largest landscape design and install groups. John specializes in residential landscaping.

