



# Green Fingers

By Anne McKeon

*All of your successes and mistakes can be seen so easily in a small area while mistakes and less desirable features can be hidden in a larger space. This often makes designing small sites more difficult but most definitely not impossible.*



Rockeries make lovely features in small gardens

Though town and city gardens are quite small as a rule, they also have many advantages such as being more sheltered and warmer (as a result of buildings and tarmac retaining heat during the day and much like storage heaters, releasing this stored heat into the garden by night). They also require less maintenance by the very fact that there is less space needing attention.

As space is at a premium in town gardens plants and features must earn their keep. Walls, fences and so on should also be used effectively. In other-words garden both on the ground (horizontally) and on the walls etc (vertically) to capitalise on the reduced amount of space available. Balconies, patios and window ledges offer other suitable locations for plants.

Shade caused by near-by buildings and overhanging trees can be a mixed blessing but remember that there are plants available that will grow in such conditions and sitting in the shade on warm summer days can be very pleasant so accept the conditions that you have and garden with them.

If your garden tends to be overly shaded, choosing colourful pots and reflective materials for pathways and walls will relieve dullness and gloominess. Water, mirrors, painted doors and so on can also be introduced for extra character and sources of brightness.

Pollution can be a problem in cities and towns but the good news is that plants are very successful at cleaning the air creating healthier environments. Leaves can filter up to 85 percent of pollutants from the air by trapping them in leaf hairs. They are then washed off the leaves by rain throughout the seasons. Conifer/evergreen trees reduce noise and light pollution and a must have in town gardens.



Small gardens can be warm, colourful and easy to maintain “outdoor rooms”

Before planting your town garden or small garden area, you must, as with any site, analyse the soil, check the direction of the sun and decide on a plan appropriate to your tastes and needs. Create good growing conditions by adding manure where necessary and ensuring sufficient soil depths for trees and shrubs.



A door or a gate to fill a gap creates the illusion of a “secret garden”



Less is more

If trees are your passion there are many suitable for smaller gardens. Consider *Prunus Shirotae* (White Cherry), *Prunus Amanagawa*, *Betula Jacquemontii* (Himalayan Birch), *Betula Verrucosa* and *Sorbus Commixta* (Rowan).

Suitable shrubs would be *Penstemon species*, *Lavandula Hidcote*, *Potentilla Tilford Cream*, *Libertia Ixioides*, *Pittosporum Nana Purpureum* and so on. The choice is endless so take time to get some professional advice and spend a few Saturdays checking out stocks in your local garden centres.

Alpine plants such as *Campanula Carpatica Blue Chips*, *Helianthemum Species*, *Dianthus Deltoides*, *Arabis Snowflake* etc are all very useful in smaller spaces and can be planted in rockeries, borders or simply in cracks and crevices in the paved areas. As these plants, as their name suggests, come from alpine regions, plant into gritty, none too rich soil.



Planted boxes and baskets have a place even in the smallest of spaces

Plants and containers are a must have in smaller spaces. These can be planted with perennial plants, low growing shrubs, heathers or with seasonal bedding plants. There are so many container types available for sale in garden centres, from hardware shops, in discount stores and so on. Of course you can always use old buckets, chimney pots and other recycled containers that might otherwise be discarded around the house and garden shed.

Spend time planning and then developing your small garden and I assure you that you will get lots of pleasure from your outdoor room.

Happy Gardening!

Anne



An obelisk to give "height" to the garden



"PensTemons" - a riot of colour

### Women and the garden - a little bit of history

Woman's place in gardening has changed over the centuries. It was once said that the job of gardening was unfit for the delicately formed hands and feet of a woman.

For much of our history the garden was a place where peasant women worked and gentlewomen walked and picked flowers and herbs. How times have changed!

The influence of women as creators and trend-setters really became apparent after the mid 19th century. At this time in history it had become a social necessity for young ladies to be well versed in botany and natural science. Text books were written by women and plants were collected by them. For example *Clematis Montana* was brought to England from India by Countess Amherst in 1826. For all of their involvement with plants, gardening as a career however was strictly a man's world.

In 1840 Jane Loudon wrote '*Gardening For Ladies*' and she pioneered the change that has led to today's equal partnership in the garden. She opened the door to gardening as a hobby for women but it took more time for female professional horticulturists to emerge. Gardening became a family activity and women began to emerge as distinguished horticulturists. Throughout the 20th century the number of influential female gardeners increased, eg. Gertrude Jekyll, Vita Sackville-West, Marjory Fish, Frances Perry etc.

In 1895 Kew employed it's first female gardeners. They caused a stir as male gardeners were no longer the only gardeners in town - enter women in trousers!

Since that time female gardeners have grown in numbers and are now well respected in the field', both as hobby gardeners and as professionals.



"Rudbeckia" - bright, cheerful and welcoming

### Garden Checklist

- Tidy up and divide herbaceous/perennial plants.
- Stake and tie trees. (Secure but not too tightly).
- Service garden machinery. Sharpen tools and oil garden implements.
- Pruning apple and pear trees by 1/3, removing dead wood and crossing branches also.
- Plant bare rooted trees and shrubs.
- Transplant ill placed plants, pruning them before lifting them.
- Clean greenhouse glass to allow more light through.
- Removed rotting fruits from stored apples. Remember the effects of the 'bad apple in the barrel'.
- Dig the vegetable garden and add organic matter.
- Propagate trees and shrubs by means of hardwood cuttings.
- Plan your garden for the year ahead. Armchair gardening is not a waste of time, you know.