

# A GARDEN FOR ALL SEASONS

Plan your garden for interest and enjoyment all day, every day.

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THERE'S AN OLD SAYING about pets: A pet is not just for Christmas—it's for a lifetime. It's rather the same with gardens. They're not just for summer. And they're not simply for the daytime. You should design your garden so it works for you all day, every day. It's not an easy trick to pull off, but in a domestic garden it's important to try.

Consider your garden after dark, for example. You may have lights close to the house for convenience or security, but you might get much more use out of the garden by extending the power line. That would open up the possibility of lighting the garden to be seen, rather than just for safe navigation. You can start to play with up-lighting, to emphasize a corrugated pine trunk or a group of white birches, or to make a pool of attractive lit space for parties or barbecues.

Electric light may not figure in your idea of gardening. It may seem too ostentatious and crude. But think how much of the year many of us live with dark evenings, when lighting would bring the garden alive, even if only as a view from the house. And perhaps taking a branch off that honey locust by the house would give you a perfect view of those glowing birch trunks



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every time you walk past the window on the stairs.

I once attended a candlelit dinner on a hot, still night in the middle of someone's lawn, the reason for the table's position becoming apparent as the evening progressed: there was a tunnel of yew trees farther down the garden, and from our table we could see straight into it. As darkness fell the tunnel was lit by lights playing on a hidden glitter-ball. It may sound rather Las Vegas, but in fact it was astonishingly beautiful, as the lights danced about on paths and trunks in that

dark cavern of foliage. Now, imagine a similar effect in your own garden, arranged to be seen from a favorite terrace or secluded bench.

Perhaps more important than the nighttime is the daytime enjoyment of your garden. As you design, or “edit,” your garden, look for ways to make the garden work for you. As a writer and gardener working from home, my idea of heaven is to eat breakfast in the garden when the weather permits. So a sheltered terrace or hard paving close to the kitchen is what I love, without steps in between, so that carrying trays is easy. But of course it has to be east-facing, to catch that morning sun. Pale colors in the plantings—lemons and pale

greens and whites—will provide a delicious and fresh start to the day.

Commuters have different priorities. They may prefer a west-facing, end-of-the-day terrace, somewhere to sit and loosen a tie and have a drink after a long day. A warmer color scheme of reds and oranges might suit here, along with the lush foliage of cannas and bamboos. If the view is terrible, or the position is windy, you might build a sheltering screen of some sort, perhaps even using colored glass through which the low sun could throw glowing patterns onto the house wall.

For some of us, gardens are social spaces, and they need to retain enough open space to allow for that over the years. Some gardeners abhor empty space, and see it as a planting opportunity lost, a vacuum where there might be fascinating detail. But gardens don't have to be subdivided to the last degree. Well-proportioned open space is satisfying in itself, especially when you work in a crowded place by day. If that is the way you feel, then it is worth hanging onto that space and resisting the temptation to dot it with small trees. It is a good idea to have your space not too preciously gardened, so that the children can kick a soccer ball around or a dog can wander into the borders without you constantly worrying about decapitating the dahlias.

It is worth planning how you get about a garden at different times of year. Dry summertime is easy enough, when you can walk on the grass without problems. But winter and early spring are a different matter. You need to be able to get around without wearing tracks into the

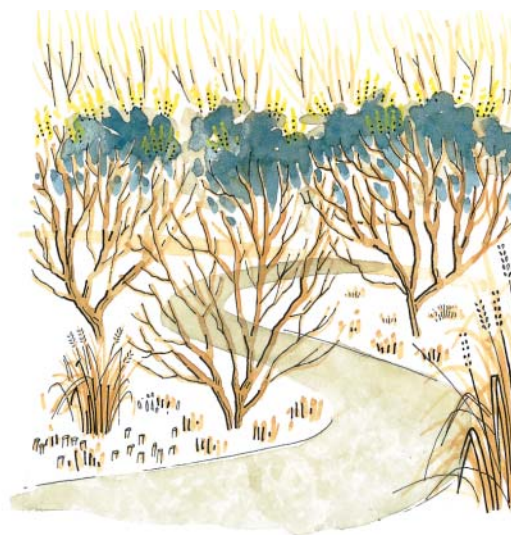
turf with a barrow or sinking into the mud when you go out to pick sprigs of some winter-flowering shrub. Perhaps you want to contrive an unobtrusive winter circuit of the garden on hard paving. Perhaps a few yards of new paving would join up a circuit of existing

hard paths. Perhaps some stepping stones across a lawn might do it, or a wooden walkway threading its way through trees and shrubs.

Think about making some bold effect in the garden that is only noticeable in winter, so that in these cold months the garden really shouts to you indoors. I am not talking about a winter-flowering shrub here and there, but something powerful and structural. If it can be colorful as well, so much the better.

Recently I saw a garden whose lawn led off into a winding path through shrubberies. In winter, when the leaves of deciduous foreground shrubs and perennials were off, a solid line of half a dozen *Mahonia* 'Winter Sun' was revealed, throwing up a spiky horizon of green foliage and yellow flowers. Behind it, backlit by the low sunlight, was an equally long line of yellow stems of the dogwood *Cornus stolonifera* 'Flaviramea'. It was a simple effect, like yellow spears above yellow battlements, telling for months, yet hidden all through the summer.

Every season in the garden deserves to surprise us, and not least winter. Plan your design and your plantings so that when the leaves are down, new views and windows and cross-vistas appear, moments special to that season only, which will encourage you to get out and enjoy the garden. ♡



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