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Lyndall Keating

# PLAN ahead

The right questions to ask and tips to consider when designing your dream garden

Words Lyndall Keating

It's a good idea to start your garden design process by asking yourself five key questions. The answers will set you on the right path to the stylish yet practical garden you and your family can enjoy for years to come.

## 1. WHAT DO I NEED FROM MY GARDEN?

This is the place to start. Like all design projects, you should focus on what your new garden should provide you with. To help structure your ideas, consider who will use the garden and what they will need. For example:

- Do you want your garden to be an entertaining area for family and friends? Does your garden have a swimming pool or kid-friendly features such as swings? Do you want to grow your own veggie garden? Don't forget areas that you can relax in!
- Do you need secure areas for pets or small children? To keep everyone safe, include fencing or hedging in your plan.

- Do you need to create privacy from neighbours or passing traffic? Consider adding hedging or feature screening to create your own space.

## 2. WHAT IS THE STYLE OF MY HOME?

Consider the architecture and street appeal of your home. Make sure your garden design complements the style of your house so that the two sit happily together. Think about whether your property style is cottage, formal, or has more of a native Australian feel.

## 3. WHAT DO I WANT FROM MY PLANTS?

Plants can provide practical solutions like screening for privacy or noise reduction. However, plants are the real stars of the garden. They provide beauty through colour, texture and form so think about whether you prefer flowers or bold foliage colour. Some people are drawn to the structure of succulents or to native Australian plants.

Your selection will depend on whether you need a low-maintenance garden. A garden does not need to be high-maintenance to make a statement, but some passionate gardeners love taking care of plants that need a little attention.

## 4. HOW EXPOSED IS MY GARDEN?

Your garden is open to all the elements, so make sure your plants will thrive in their environment. Study the sun direction and the garden's exposure to wind and rain. Choose plants according to your soil types, whether it be rock or sandy.

## 5. WHAT WOULD BE A GOOD FOCAL POINT?

A good garden design has a focal point or a series of eye-catching interests. This is the easiest garden design principle to put into place. Try sculpture, feature plants, water features, firepits, garden benches or seating. Incorporate decorative screens or green walls for vertical interest.

## Back to front

These tips will help you to create a beautiful front garden which is not only a pleasure to walk through each day but practical, too.

### THINK ABOUT YOUR PRACTICAL NEEDS

You need a path to the front door but will your kids also need to play in the front garden? If your garden is large enough, you can include a lawn for playing ball games or some hard surfaces for little cyclists.

Also think about the best lighting solutions

for your garden to make sure you can walk up paths and steps safely. Well-chosen light fittings will ensure your garden looks just as good at night as it does during the day.

Do you need to build storage solutions into your front garden? It is much easier to plan attractive, hidden storage solutions at the beginning of the design process.

### HOW MUCH PRIVACY DO YOU NEED?

There are many screening options for providing privacy from neighbours or passing

traffic. If physical structures like fences and walls don't appeal, you can cleverly position attractive hedges or shrubs to hide the things you don't want other people to see, such as bins and bicycles.

Do you need gates for security or containing pets? Well-chosen gates can also provide privacy.

### MAXIMISE YOUR STREET APPEAL

The key to achieving a stylish front garden is making sure your design is in sync with the style of your home. Consider whether your property is architecturally modern, more traditional like a Federation or cottage home, or has a coastal feel. Choose layout, plants and features to create an harmonious overall impression from the street.

### CHOOSE YOUR PLANTS WISELY

Consider the size of your front garden in relation to your property. Install compact features and plants in smaller gardens so the space is not overwhelmed. If your front garden is large, consider a tree to create a high-impact focal point.

### HIRE A PROFESSIONAL

A professional horticulturist will not only give you ideas, but also help you make the most of your design budget. This is the best way to ensure you don't waste money on expensive plants that won't thrive. Horticulturists are highly knowledgeable about plants, environmental conditions and garden design. They will generally inspect your garden, then create a tailored plan for your needs, taking into account:

- Your location
- The garden's aspect and soil type
- The size and style of your property
- Whether you need your garden to be low-maintenance
- Your budget



Owner and director of Garden Society, Lyndall Keating is a qualified horticulturist with a Bachelor of Science. She brings more than two decades of plant knowledge and experience in maintaining some of the world's best gardens. Garden Society is a boutique garden design and maintenance company for Sydney homeowners. [gardensociety.com.au](http://gardensociety.com.au)



**Plants you'll love**

**Shrubs and foliage**

- *Raphiolepis* 'Oriental Pearl'
- *Loropetalum chinense*
- *Viburnum odoratissimum*
- *Phormium tenax*
- *Furcraea foetida*
- *Alcantarea imperialis*
- *Philodendron* 'Xanadu'

**Succulents**

- *Agave attenuata*
- *Crassula* 'Bluebird'
- *Yucca elephantipes*
- *Crassula ovata*
- *Sansevieria* 'Congo'
- *Senecio serpens*

**Pots**

- *Crassula* 'Bluebird'
- *Kalanchoe* 'Copper Spoons'
- *Sedum* 'Green Mound'

3. Put your outdoor cooking zone under cover so you can use it throughout the year. Here, it has been set into a concrete cabinet which also incorporates a fridge. The louvred screen behind is remote-controlled.

Photography: Natalie Humfalvey



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*Diverse materials and plants take a rooftop sky high!*

**Ideas for you**

- Choose tough plant species that can cope with heat, sun and wind. Shade-tolerant plants will be needed too, for the areas under rooflines and awnings.
- Avoid choosing tall plants, as these are especially susceptible to wind. Keep plantings dense and low.
- Rooftop gardens need lots of softening, so be generous with plantings of greenery and introduce soft-upholstered sofas, chairs and cushions.
- Cluster pots and urns in the corners of the space to round off the hard angles.
- Include outdoor lighting for night time use and consider an outdoor heater for winter.

4. Textured pots are a great way to soften tiled or paved areas like this space. Cluster them in corners to help blur the geometric lines – this pot is planted with *Crassula* 'Bluebird'.

5. When turning an outdoor space into a suite of living areas, always position the dining area as close as possible to the house, and ensure there is some form of overhead cover. In this garden it sits beneath

the roofline and beside the barbecue. A timber table brings warmth and pattern to the scene, while beyond it, a magnificent specimen of *Dracaena draco* creates a focal point at the end of the garden.

6. Completely private but with a view of the world, a rooftop garden offers a special kind of space. Note the inviting armchairs, rustic log stools and soft uplighting.



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*How good is this glass fence! Check page 52 for safety notes*