

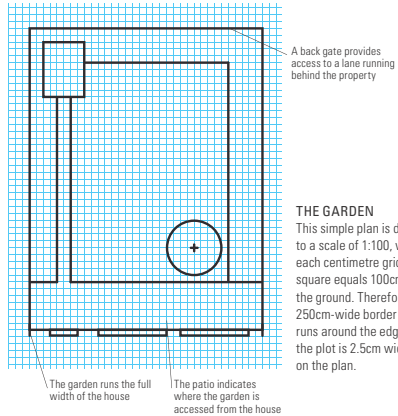
Experimenting with plans

More accurate than a bubble diagram or sketch, a scale drawing enables you to experiment with different layouts in enough detail to ensure that the design fits and works well. Although all proposed elements, such as paths and planting, must be drawn to scale, the drawing does not need to be too technical. Here, designer Richard Sneesby explores four ideas for one simple plot.

ONE GARDEN: FOUR SOLUTIONS

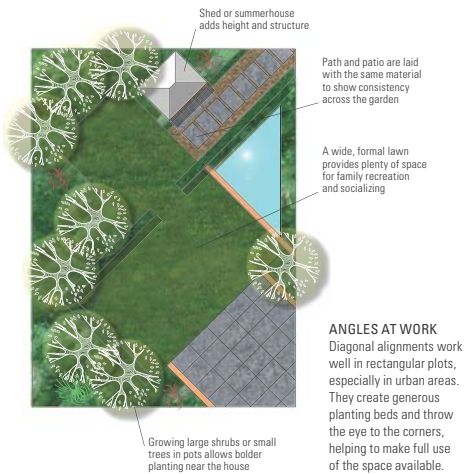
This simple plan (see right) shows a rectangular plot, with the rear elevation of the house located along the bottom line. Adjoining the house is a patio, and the garden includes an existing tree and shed. There is also a rear access gate in the top-right corner.

Each of the four plans shows different design options for this site. All feature a lawn, pond, paving/deck area, as well as access to the back gate, and three include a shed. The tree has been removed in two schemes, as it would compromise the suggested layout.



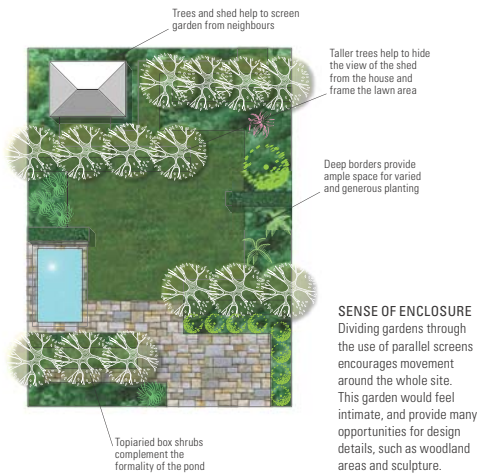
OPTION ONE

By positioning rectangular areas diagonally, the corner-to-corner orientation of this garden gives it a dramatic appearance. The design provides planting areas that are deep enough for larger specimens, and a triangular pond that can be appreciated from the nearby seating area. This is a garden of two halves, with a hedge dividing (and possibly screening) the two lawn areas, allowing each section to be given a distinct character.



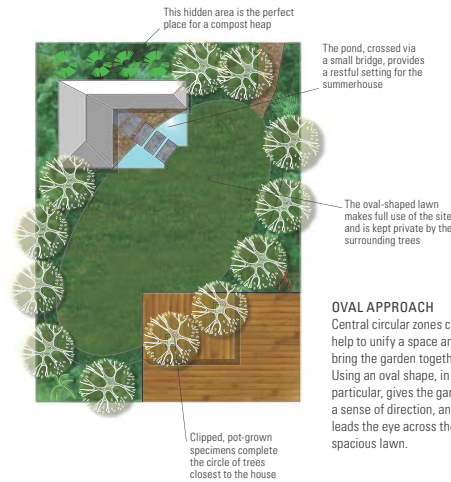
OPTION TWO

The garden here is divided by a series of hedges that create a visual and physical chicane, keeping views short and varied; they also act as a unifying element across the plot. The hedges would be grown to different heights to allow or inhibit views, giving visual variety. Rows of trees reinforce the division created by the hedges but would allow views beneath their canopies. The design also includes rectilinear flowerbeds, a formal pond, and a shed hidden behind a high hedge.



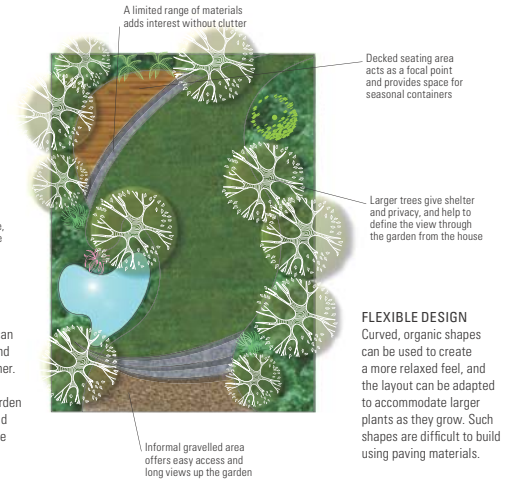
OPTION THREE

With its strong diagonal axis, this design works in a similar way to Option one. The oval-shaped lawn provides a central space, further defined by a low, flowering hedge. The trees also help reinforce the geometry and partially enclose the central area. The summerhouse is a focal element here, while a decked area and pool overlap on to the lawn to provide opportunities for attractive detailing. The planting beds are deep and generous.



OPTION FOUR

This curvilinear plan would be more complicated to set out on the ground than the other designs, but would accommodate existing features and levels more easily. The lines are sweeping organic curves, the pond much less formal, and there are two distinct seating areas. Planting beds vary in width to allow a wide variety of plants and combinations to be grown. However, as there are no hedges, taller plants would be needed to prevent the garden from looking and feeling too open.



USING DESIGN SOFTWARE

Computer-aided design (CAD) is a useful tool which, among other things, allows the user to create three-dimensional garden designs and accurate scale drawings. There are several software packages available and most are quick to learn. However, it is a good idea to ask for a demonstration and to try a package yourself before deciding which to buy, as features and design tools vary. Some, for instance, cover planting and plant selection very well but offer only a limited library of design features. Similarly, while some packages animate how selected plants will grow and develop over time, very few deal with earthworks or changes in ground level. Also, check that the garden design software you choose is appropriate for your locality, and provides a searchable database of plants suitable for your soil and climate.

DESIGN LIMITATIONS

Many packages provide a small library of generic garden features. These simplify the design process but are often old-fashioned, so are less suitable for contemporary schemes.



DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Most garden design packages allow the user to view a potential design at eye level, as well as from above. This is very useful in showing how well the finished design will look and work on the ground.