

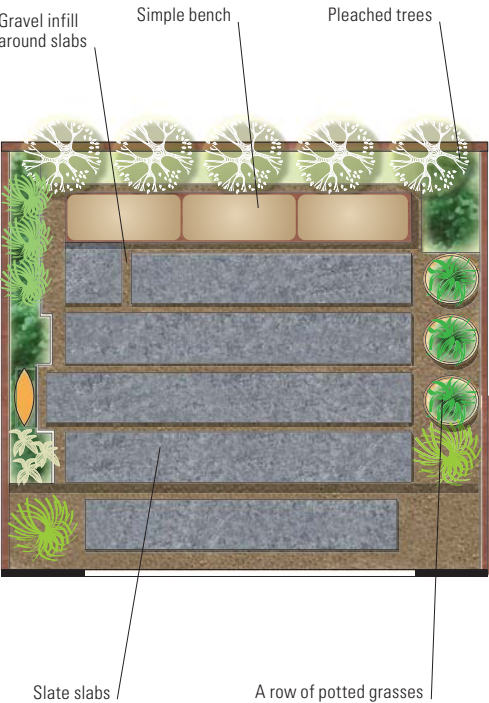
What is urban style?

Today’s city gardens have to work hard, providing space for planting, relaxation, play, and entertaining. As the high price of land in urban areas has squeezed the size of gardens, new ideas for small spaces have emerged. Approaches vary, but most urban gardens are treated either as functional spaces or as green oases – both offer a private escape or retreat from hectic city life. In the former, hard surfaces dominate,

creating a stage for multiple uses. Architectural treatments to boundary walls, furniture, and water features create elegant “rooms”, often lit after dark to create extensions to the home. In the latter, planting dominates, often taking over areas that could have been used for entertainment or play. This intensive planting approach benefits the keen urban gardener, who may even use the space as a productive allotment.

URBAN STYLE IN DETAIL

The urban garden layout needs a simple, clear geometry. Planting similarly needs careful thought, as space is limited – the trend has been for fewer species that work harder seasonally, providing architectural or sculptural interest. Grasses and large-leaved foliage plants are popular with designers of this style. In many city gardens, sliding or folding doors create a seamless transition between interior and exterior “rooms”, extending the living area. Paved or decked surfaces help to increase functional space; materials are often selected to match interior finishes, further unifying indoors and outdoors. Pergolas or pleached trees offer privacy in overlooked minimalist spaces, while dense planting can achieve the same effect in more naturalistic urban gardens. Sculpture provides a focal point, often combined with water used in jets or cascades rather than pools. Built-in seating fits architecturally, but can limit the flexibility of the garden. Stylish furniture and identical containers in a row add drama and rhythm.



CITY GARDEN
Here, garden designer Philip Nixon has created a simple but decorative plan with timber-clad walls complementing the furniture, and folding doors that lead out from the house (right). Planting is a mix of perennials, grasses, and evergreens, with the addition of tall pleached hornbeams, which provide valuable screening.



A John Brookes design for a London garden.

DESIGN INFLUENCES

Evocative of country gardens, early city designs were often heavily planted and complex in layout. Today, they have become much simpler. In 1839, JC Loudon – the Scottish botanist, garden designer and garden magazine editor – responded to increasing urbanization and the diminishing size of city gardens in his book *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*. In it, he classified different design approaches to the small

urban garden, including low-maintenance designs. More than a century later, John Brookes published a series of successful books that, like Loudon before him, addressed designs for smaller plots, and explored the idea of the “outdoor room”. More recently, the Japanese have led the way in designing tiny outdoor spaces. In their densely populated cities, balconies or light wells are often the only areas available for planting.

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS



1 DRAMATIC CONTAINERS
Clay, stone, or steel plant containers are often repeated for effect. Fill them with clipped box or – for a softer, more informal look – a mix of perennials and grasses.



2 SCULPTURAL FURNITURE
Artfully designed furniture – in the shape of bespoke built-in benches, coordinated tables and chairs, or recliners – gives the garden focus and answers a functional need.



3 LIGHTING
With the introduction of low-voltage and LED systems, lighting has become more sophisticated. Use it to emphasize your garden’s contours and plants.



4 PLEACHED TREES
In overlooked city gardens, pleached trees (which look like hedges on stilts) provide privacy while using little floor space. Use lime, hornbeam, or evergreen holly oak.



5 STYLISH MATERIALS
Designers often employ a mix of materials to maximize texture and interest. Both natural and man-made materials, such as concrete, glass and steel, are popular.