



## Small Garden: Big Impact

By Karen Chapman CPH

If you are struggling to envision an artistic yet functional design for your small space, this presentation will teach you how to make the most of longer sight lines, discuss color palettes, explain how dividing a space can make it feel larger, and teach you how to consider placement of containers and other focal points. Whether you have a roof garden, courtyard, balcony or deck you'll glean lots of ideas to create maximum impact in the smallest of spaces.

### 4 Common, Challenging Scenarios

#### The Need for Privacy

Before you plant a giant evergreen consider:

- How high does it need to be to provide a screen?
- Do you need screening year round or just during the summer months?
- Can you plant in the ground or can you only use containers?
- Do you want to use plants or can you consider building some sort of structure?

Look for tall, skinny trees/ shrubs or espalier to suit. Espaliered pear & quince shown) See '**Want more ideas?**' for slender conifers and shrubs in my blog posts plus a free download.

Avoid dense plantings of dark evergreens which can be oppressive in a small space. Also avoid doubling up with fence + evergreens. Instead look for species which can be limbed up and allow for softer plantings beneath, leaving the canopy above the fence line to provide the privacy.

Consider scrim for filtering views. This can be achieved with airy species such as *Verbena bonariensis*, *Sanguisorba* or ornamental grasses. Or get creative with structures incorporating art panels or even chalk boards for the kids.

#### No In-Ground Planting Possible

- Use containers for privacy plantings and/or room dividers
- Use pots with a small footprint – but tall enough to add height. Elliptical or oval pots are perfect for small spaces
- Use walls to hang troughs and hanging baskets, integrate small wall or table-top fountains, and find narrow outdoor tables to be functional without overpowering the space.
- Cluster containers in groups for layering heights

- Square pots interlock easier than those with a round profile

### Shallow but Wide Gardens

The longest line within a rectangle (a typical garden shape), is the diagonal line. Therefore, orient garden seating area to look down this axis, at 45° to the house. Perhaps you can 'borrow' a distant view to visually expand your space?

Avoid straight, narrow paths in shallow gardens as these which encourage a rapid exit! Add gentle curves to the path or break up the strict line of the path by using dimensional pavers, perhaps slightly offset. Incorporate a focal point along the way, ideally opposite a window, but otherwise at the 1/3 or 2/3 mark. Either of these tactics encourages a slower pace and therefore makes the journey down the path feel longer.

### Narrow Side Gardens

Many planned housing communities have the minimum 5-foot setback between houses. Making that even more challenging, it may not be possible to erect a fence between the two properties so privacy is a concern.

A narrow garden doesn't mean you have to use short plants, however. Think of columnar trees and shrubs for vertical interest, or use an ornamental obelisk with or without a vine. Intersperse these with shorter shrubs and perennials to create layers of plants with a variety of heights, colors and textures.

In lieu of a fence consider a trellis for climbers e.g. roses, clematis, jasmine, or a series of archways, or even a pergola festooned with flowers.

If your side path has an awkward endpoint, perhaps that can become a mini destination for a bench, a specimen plant or a water feature?

## **3 Key Design Strategies**

- Color/plant repetition – creates a sense of cohesion, moves the eye around a space and can blur inside/outside boundaries. Place groups of short grasses at intervals, adjacent to the path in a zig-zag fashion to amplify or suggest curves.
- Create intimacy – a sense of safety or immersion within the garden using plants to create a loose enclosure on three sides. If using a structure ensure this has an openness about it, perhaps with lattice or laser-cut panels to avoid it feeling oppressive.
- Create a garden that can be experienced, not just observed. Engage all the senses. Include plants that are tactile, elements that move in a breeze, the sound of water or chimes and fragrance. Add 'garden moments' to be discovered such as partially obscured garden art. Create memories.

*“Find joy in the little things”*

### Want more ideas?

- Check out my [website and blog](#) for inspiration, events, newsletters, garden tours, and free stuff!
- Check out these blog posts on [Skinny Shrubs for Tight Spaces](#) and [Skinny Conifers for Tight Spaces](#)
- Sign up for my [newsletter](#) and get a *free download* of **Top 10 Skinny Trees**
- **Questions?** Email me [karen@lejardinetdesigns.com](mailto:karen@lejardinetdesigns.com)

