

# CITY LIMITS

Lack of space need not constrain creativity. Here, two urban gardens - minimal and rectilinear in London; colourful and luxuriant in New York - show contrasting approaches to a small plot



The London garden: smart and minimal, with an effective lighting scheme



The New York garden: colourful and abundant - a hidden haven

Planning and designing a small garden can be a challenge, but there are plenty of ways to maximise the space you have - whether it's a shady courtyard, a roof terrace or a long, narrow, London garden. First, work out exactly how you want to use the garden. Do you want a functional, stylish space for entertaining, or a quiet and private haven? Think also about the kind of mood you want to create. The two gardens shown here, one in London, one in New York, demonstrate how completely different two similarly small spaces can be - the rose garden is soft and sensual, an escapist retreat from the city, while the other space is modern and minimal with clean, simple lines.

One of the most basic tenets of creating a small garden is not to over-complicate either the design or the elements with which you fill it, otherwise the space will feel overcrowded and oppressive. Keep the concept simple, limiting yourself to one or two hard materials and a small plant range. Detail is important when the focus is inwards rather than outwards, and the emphasis should be on quality, not quantity.

A successful small garden is all about illusion, and there are various ways to trick the eye into believing that the space is bigger. For a long, narrow, town garden, one of the most effective solutions is to divide the space into sections, so that the eye doesn't take it all in at once - the garden unfolds bit by bit, increasing the element of surprise, and seems larger than it really is. 'It is good to tease the eye,' says garden designer Cleve West. 'People are hesitant about blocking views, but gardens are more interesting if you can't see everything in one go.' Divisions can be made in various ways - hedges, trellising, a water feature, or a bed of grasses and tall perennials to blur the view to the end of the garden.

Using vertical space is important - where there isn't room to spread out, there is always scope to go up, so choose vigorous climbing plants, tall, narrow trees, or a large focal point such as a water feature, to draw the eye outwards and upwards. Sculptures, pots or obelisks can also be used to add height, and pleached limes or hornbeams are effective in a small urban garden, especially if screening is needed.

Lighting is particularly useful in a small garden, giving it a completely different atmosphere at night. Charlotte Rowe, who designed the garden opposite, is adamant that lighting is paramount in small, urban gardens: 'Good-quality, subtle garden lighting really pushes the boundaries and creates additional living space, particularly in town gardens. Today's lifestyles mean that for six months of the year, for working people, the garden is seen only at night,' she explains. At night, the boundaries of the garden become indistinct, and with good lighting, you should be unaware of the size of the space you are sitting in.

Another tip that many garden designers give is to ensure that the garden reflects the style of the house - a seamless transition from one to another can make the garden feel more spacious. Many small gardens are natural extensions of the house, reflecting architectural and interior design styles and blurring boundaries between inside and out. But on the other hand, some people prefer to walk out of their house and feel that they're in a separate world. Interior designer Lemeau Arrott-Watt, whose garden is pictured overleaf, sees her garden as a retreat from busy New York life. A bower of roses is the last thing you'd expect in such a hard, urban landscape, but by its very unexpectedness it works, providing a colourful antidote to the cityscape beyond □



## LONDON

This long, narrow garden in Notting Hill has a strong, simple layout with a 10-metre rill as its main focus. The pale Portuguese limestone gives a feeling of space, while the decking areas running horizontally across the width of the garden, and bridging the rill, divide the long space into sections. At the far end of the garden, a row of pleached hornbeams adds height and helps to screen the view of the buildings beyond. The plant range is minimal and rhythmic, in greens, creams and purples, including *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' and *Geranium* 'Johnson's Blue'. The lighting scheme, designed by Rebecca Weir of Light IQ (tel: 020-8749 1900), is subtle and effective, with lights set under each section of decking to cast light along the rill through the length of the garden, and uplighters under the pleached hornbeams. Designer Charlotte Rowe says: 'The devil is in the detail when designing small gardens. Because space is at a premium, it is crucial that full advantage is taken of every centimetre, and that the area works both functionally and visually.' Charlotte Rowe (tel: 020-7602 0660; [www.charlotterowe.com](http://www.charlotterowe.com))



A 10-metre-long rill, the main focus of the garden, is bridged by rows of decking, which serve to divide the space into sections. At night, a subtle lighting scheme blurs the boundaries of the garden, emphasising the sense of space