



STRUCTURES

GARDEN DESIGNER CLEVE WEST ADVISES ON CHOOSING ATTRACTIVE AND APPROPRIATE STRUCTURES THAT WILL COMPLEMENT YOUR GARDEN'S SIZE AND STYLE



Since the formal gardens of the 17th century structures have provided focal points and gestures of grandeur in larger estates. Even William Kent and those who abandoned formality in the 18th century in favour of the pastoral scene used temples, pavilions and follies to lend narrative to their landscapes. As gardens became smaller in the 20th century structures were still employed, albeit on a reduced scale.

Pergolas, arbors, gazebos and the humble shed are use-

ful additions to the garden, but need careful siting to work. Structures, unless they have been planned from the outset, can end up looking like afterthoughts. For instance, conservatories, which extend the living space into the garden, will look awkward tacked on to a house without considering the existing architecture. A straightforward extension is a better alternative.

Traffic congestion and changing lifestyles mean more people

ABOVE: A SUMMERHOUSE AT GLEN CHANTRY'S GARDEN IN ESSEX. RIGHT: A GOTHIC RUIN.



ELEMENTS OF GARDEN DESIGN



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: THE UNHEATED VICTORIAN GLASSHOUSE AT AUDLEY END KITCHEN GARDEN IN ESSEX PROVIDES A PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT FOR STORING TENDER PLANTS IN WINTER AND RAISING SEEDLINGS. A

LEAN-TO GREENHOUSE IN DAPPLED SHADE BLENDS IN WITH THE GARDEN. THIS DARK, TEN-METRE LONG TUNNEL OF BEECH (*FAGUS SYLVATICA*) AT LE JARDIN DE L'ALCHIMISTE IN PROVENCE FRAMES A VIEW OF THE GARDEN BEYOND.



Clockwise from top: Centre Kogswold; Derek St. Remaine; Andrea Jones

now consider the option of working from home. Television makeover programmes have shown what's possible with state-of-the-art garden structures that provide a place to work, entertain or bathe. While it might arguably be easier to move house, the idea of using the garden in this way is an interesting notion.

However, such structures take away land that could otherwise be planted. This impacts upon the insects and wildlife that share our gardens, especially in cities where green space is at a premium. Greening walls and roofs will offset this to a degree, but involves further expense that people aren't always prepared to meet.

Conservatories Blurring the boundaries between the house ending and the garden beginning has been a seductive notion since the Victorians built the first glasshouses. But the popularity of conservatories in the eighties and nineties slowed down when people realised they are not as idyllic or practical as they sound. Aside from getting the design

to sit comfortably with the style and proportions of the house, allowances need to be made for heating, ventilation, shading and the watering of plants. For conservatories, with their fluctuating temperature, can be hostile environments to both plants and people. Be sure about what you want from your conservatory – if you want plants make sure their requirements are a priority. Also be aware that a conservatory will involve major work in terms of alterations to the house, so the services of a reputable contractor and perhaps an architect will be necessary.

Pergolas & Arbours These structures often double as a framework for climbing plants. Pergolas usually cover a path that links different parts of the garden, and often frame a focal point. An arbour, on the other

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: A SHADED PLACE TO SIT IN THE MARGATE COMMUNITY GARDEN. AN ORNATE ARBOUR BECOMES A FOCAL POINT AT SOMERSET LODGE IN WEST SUSSEX. THIS IDYLIC SHACK IS USED AS A PHOTOGRAPHER'S STUDIO.



From top: Stuart Cuffie; Derek St. Remaine; Nicola Bennett

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hand, is the focal point, strategically positioned as an inviting place to sit. Vines were the original inspiration for such structures but now honeysuckle, rose and jasmine are popular, as their scent can be appreciated by anyone walking through or sitting beneath. Usually these structures are built using timber, metal, brick or stone uprights with timber crossbeams. The main concern when choosing materials is cost and durability. Softwood timber can be treated with preservative and concreted directly into the ground. However the structure will last much longer if the uprights sit in a metal shoe or a small brick pier that prevents the base of the post from touching the ground, where moisture will accelerate decay. Hardwood is more expensive but doesn't need preservative and weathers to a silvery finish. Rounded or rustic poles can also be used, though are less durable and only really work in a rural setting.

Dimensions for a pergola

or arbour vary enormously. The uprights need to be strong enough to keep the structure from buckling when it is covered with plants, but thicker uprights can look rather clumsy and oppressive. Thinner uprights with wider crossbeams are more elegant and will let your plants do the talking.

Brick or stone uprights are much thicker and generally look better in large gardens where the structure is in proportion with its surroundings. Here the plants must work harder to clothe the structure adequately.

Tubular steel can be used to support timber crossbeams and is a useful alternative where space is an issue. It will be less prone to decay if galvanised, painted or coated in plastic.

RIGHT, FROM TOP: A ROBUST ARCHWAY IS SOFTENED BY *EUPATORIUM PURPUREUM* 'ATROPURPUREUM', *CARPINUS BETULUS* (HORNBEAM) TRAINED INTO A SERIES OF ARCHWAYS IN THE PRIEURE NOTRE-DAME D'ORSAN GARDENS IN FRANCE.



From top: Peter Anderson, Derek St. Remaire, Clive Rice

ABOVE AND RIGHT: THE SHED IN CLEVE WEST'S GARDEN HAS A GRASS ROOF TO REPLACE PLANTS LOST AT GROUND



ELEMENTS OF GARDEN DESIGN



Gazebos are not as fashionable as they used to be. They are covered structures (usually hexagonal in shape), and are usually found in larger gardens. They serve as a focal point and a place to relax in all weathers, and have romantic connotations as a meeting place for lovers. A journey through the garden to the gazebo will raise expectations and accentuate feelings of seclusion and occasion.

Summerhouses I've always thought of a summerhouse as a cross between a large gazebo and a shed. They suit larger gardens where garden furniture can be stored, and may also be used for table tennis, billiards, or to house a sauna or a covered pool or Jacuzzi. The ones I have seen are generally used for storage and nothing else, and tend to accrue garden machinery, overwintering plants, toys and bikes.

Arches It's no use hoping that a structure will look good once the climbing plants have matured. Arches should look good on their own without plants. This is probably why aluminium vinyl covered arches are not my favourite addition to any space. I often see them plonked arbitrarily in a garden, slightly crooked with no path either to or from and no real reason to be there. I tend to resist buying any gardenware in kit form as it rarely bears any relevance to the proportions of the house and the garden's design. However, I can see there is an advantage in terms of cost and convenience, and where space is limited.

Wooden arches are more substantial and are easier to design or customise, as are brick arches (though these are generally worked into the design of a wall and will therefore need more

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: A RUSTIC SHED ON CLEVE WEST'S ALLOTMENT IS BOTH CHARMING AND PRACTICAL. THIS COMPACT BLACK SHED WITH A SEDUM ROOF PROVIDES STORAGE WITHOUT BEING INTRUSIVE IN A SMALL URBAN GARDEN.

planning). Remember that plants also have value in terms of structure. Trees, shrubs, hedges and topiary can be used to create a living framework for the garden to support the ebb and flow of the seasons, and plants can flesh out the spaces in between. An arch through hedges is therefore often the simplest but most dramatic of all, time having given it the edge and a certain dignity.

Sheds I believe sheds are underrated, and if chosen carefully can lend real character to a garden. Sheds come in all sizes and styles from DIY stores, and are a vital element in the garden in terms of storage. Unfortunately manufacturers like to exaggerate the fact that most prefabricated sheds are ugly by staining them bright orange. Paint it dark brown or even black and you have something quite acceptable. Custom-designed and built sheds are significantly more expensive and most people choose not to spend vast sums of money on something they are going to store tools in. Growing grass or sedum on the shed roof can add another dimension.

Extend that roof to create an arch and it will provide focus, direction and environmental interest.

Play structures, from climbing frames to tree houses, can provide a valuable addition to any family garden. These need to be robust, secure and positioned to provide a reasonable view and easy access from the house. When building a tree house care must be taken not to damage the tree, and it is also worth consulting a specialist to ensure safety. However, don't underestimate the power of a child's imagination. Simple structures like a teepee can bring endless fun and laughter.

A final point: freestanding structures in the garden may need planning permission so it is always advisable to contact your local authority.

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