

# ***GARDEN ROOMS***

The concept of creating garden rooms is centuries old. The terraced Italian gardens built in the 16th century were a series of rooms that ranged from formal to informal. The French and English also designed their gardens as a series of rooms divided by hedges and walls, all linked by paths. Today we are adapting these same ideas to our home landscapes, creating functional spaces or “rooms” where we live and play in the outdoors. Because many of us spend our days in office buildings, we look for ways to connect with nature in our free time. There has been a surge of interest in reviving older gardening traditions in which the house and landscape work together as an integrated whole. We’ve begun to think of the garden as an extension of the home. Considering the garden as an additional room and giving it the same care and attention as your interior rooms allows you to create a pleasing outdoor space where you and your family will want to spend time. A well-planned garden room can extend your living area into the outdoors, providing extra space you and your family will want to spend time.

A well-planned garden room can extend your living area into the outdoors, providing extra space for entertainment and recreation. Garden rooms can be created with different themes or purposes. And, like your interior rooms, these outdoor rooms should be personal, designed and decorated to reflect your own unique tastes and interests.

***What Is a Garden Room?*** It is a garden conceived as a room, or series of rooms, complete with floors, walls, ceilings, and furnishings, each with distinct functions and each carefully integrated with its surroundings. Garden rooms separate outdoor living areas from functional, not-so attractive spaces such as compost piles and stacks of firewood. Garden rooms create privacy, separating play and utility areas from eating or socializing areas. Garden rooms define a space.

***Start with a Plan*** Sketch a drawing of your existing yard and identify the areas that are currently being used in your yard— front, back and sides. Use accurate measurements and draw it to scale. Include walkways, patios, trees and shrubs. Make note of an area’s current use and any changes you would like to make. Ask yourself questions about how you plan to use your garden space. Do you have children that need room to play? How often do you entertain? Do you need a storage area, workspace, or a place for the compost pile?

Using your sketch, draw in the “rooms” as you would like to see them. Remember, you don’t need lots of rooms in your garden. As Jim Childs says, “Start simple with just one divider and the rest of the garden will often evolve on its own.” It may help if you think of garden rooms in terms of the rooms in your house.

A vegetable garden could be viewed as the kitchen. A flower garden along with a patio or deck could be the family room where friends and family gather. An area with grass and plantings that can’t be easily damaged by a ball game could be the playroom. And the plantings near your front door are similar to the formal living room—they need to make a good impression!

***Creating Garden Rooms*** Just as walls define the rooms in your house, garden rooms must also have defined parameters or walls. The walls can be defined in many ways. A brick or stone wall or any kind of fence provides the fastest and easiest way to divide a garden into rooms. But the walls of your room can also be created with plantings, such as evergreen hedges, trees planted in a specific pattern, a deciduous shrub border or a perennial border. Use planters of varying heights to create the suggestion of a wall or partition or an espalier as a living fence. Space can also be defined with hardscape—walkways, pergolas, gazebos, trellises, arbors, or seating. And if your yard slopes, using the shifts in grade can naturally create distinct spaces with steps providing the transition between rooms.

To design a garden room, provide structure by combining both plant and hardscape materials.

## ***Points to Consider***

**View:** Walk around the yard observing the views from different locations. A hedge, wall or trellis can enhance a good view by framing it or blocking an undesirable view. Also pay attention to the view of your garden room from inside the house. Remember, your garden room is an extension of your home; they are connected.

**Scale:** When creating garden rooms, keep in mind the idea of scale. Scale relates to size, and it is the visual relationship of each part of a garden to every other part. A garden room should be large enough to be useful, but its size also needs to be proportionate to the size of the house. It also follows that the “walls” and the accessories used within the room need to be in proportion to the room. A plant’s mature size, the size of a statue or fountain should be considered when working with enclosed spaces. Garden rooms should create a feeling of intimacy, not of being closed in.

**Repetition and rhythm:** An organized repetition of elements brings a sense of unity and continuity. To create a connection between a house and a garden room, use materials that relate to the home. Repeating architectural elements of a house will also reinforce continuity. One of the advantages of dividing the garden into separate rooms is that each room or garden can have its own theme or personality. By repeating design elements or accessories, the rooms are tied together. Repeating color themes and textures, recurring fragrances, a brick walkway that connects the front of the home to the backyard, fences and trellises made of the same material . . . all help create continuity.

## ***Useful Materials for a Garden Room***

- **Floors:** Brick, Stone, Gravel, Grass, Groundcovers, Mulch, Wood, Decking, Concrete
- **Ceilings:** Open sky, Tree canopy, Arbor, Pergola, Gazebo, Awnings
- **Walls:** Existing buildings, Fences, Trellises, Hedges, Trees, Espalier
- **Doorways:** Arbors, Arches, Pergolas, Gates, Symmetrical plantings, Hedges with openings
- **Accessories:** Colorful & textural plants, Rocks and boulders, Garden furniture, Statuary Art objects, Distinctive containers, Birdhouse, Birdbaths, Fountains, Sundials

***Personalize Your Garden Room*** After creating your garden room, give it some personality. If the garden room is an area intended for entertaining and conversation, make sure that you have comfortable and inviting places to sit, linger and relax. A bench, a swing, a hammock, or a table and chairs work well in a garden room setting.

Maximize the use of focal points in garden rooms. Carefully chosen garden accessories can serve as focal points or help to establish a specific mood. A piece of statuary may create a place of contemplation. A mobile or a whimsical birdhouse may create a playful mood.

Container plants can be used as accent pieces in a garden room, much the same way as floral arrangements are used to enhance interior rooms. To make less appear more in any limited space, add lots of container plants. Small trees, hanging baskets and topiary plants can make any area appear lush and full.

Consider fragrance as you plan your garden spaces. Scented flowers and herbs planted close to a walkway or sitting area will add a pleasant fragrance to the surrounding areas. Include fragrant vines and night blooming flowers.

Waterfalls, fountains, and manmade streams add a peaceful, calming sound to the landscape. Their sound can entice visitors to enter your garden room, as well as buffer the sounds of traffic or other outside noises. Water features lend drama to a small garden and the reflective qualities of water add depth and mystery.

Consider using low voltage lighting to expand the use of your outdoor garden rooms. Kits are available for an easy do-it-yourself project. Hanging string lights, using candles or torches are other ways of adding light to an outdoor room.