

Tips for In-Town Gardens

A city dwelling has its perks, but space for a large garden is not one of them. Landscape architect William T. Smith gives 12 tips for optimizing in-town gardens

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Simple Garden Design

1. Keep it simple. "Complicated patterns and plant combinations get distracting and crowded," says Smith. "Don't think you have to line shrubs along the entire façade or garden wall. Consider using them only to accentuate key architectural points. Remember, good garden design should enhance the house, not bring it to its knees."

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Low Maintenance

2. Go for low maintenance. Don't make gardening a chore with hours of maintenance every week. Self-sufficient succulents provide as much aesthetic enjoyment as the fussiest of perennials.

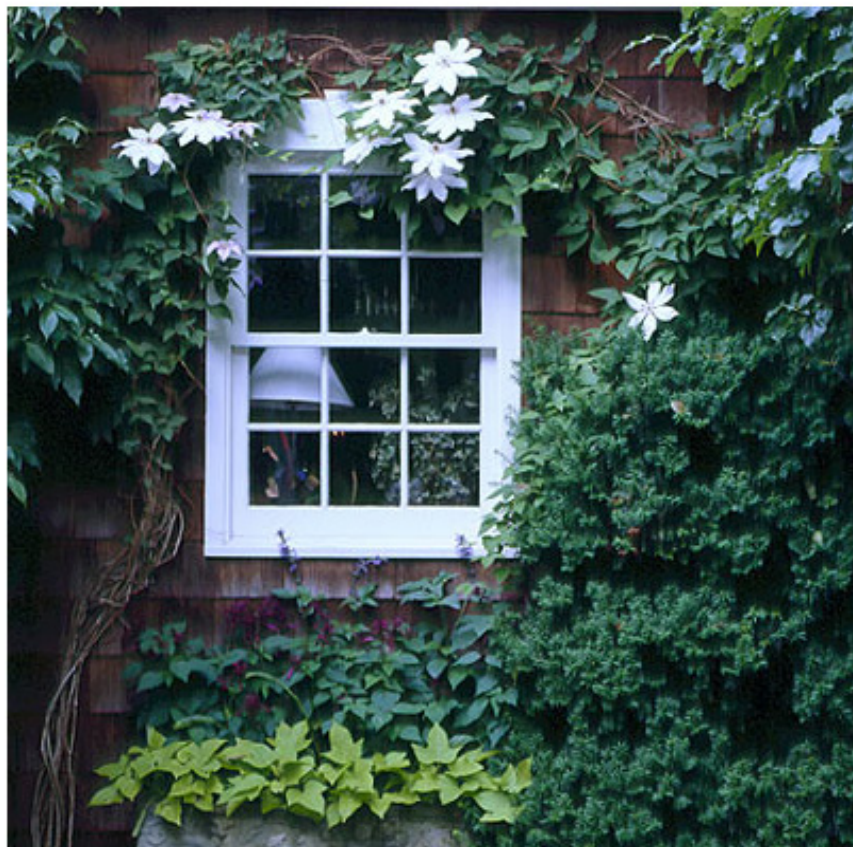
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Color Matters

3. Keep the color palette simple. "It starts feeling crazy when there are too many contrasting colors and textures in a space," Smith says.

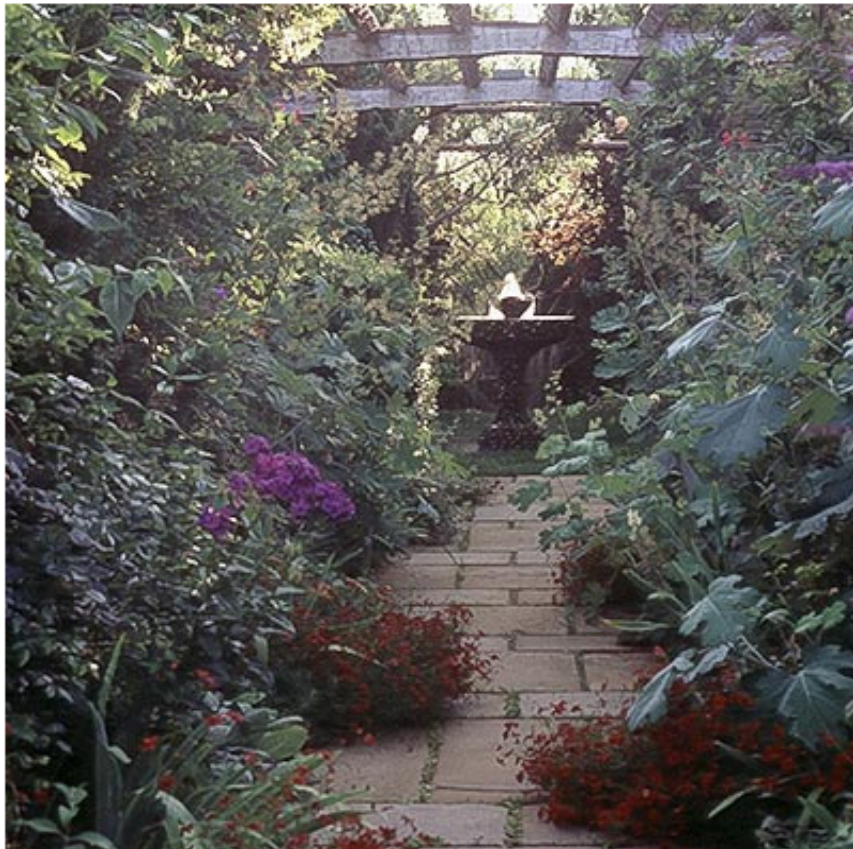
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Special Touches

4. Have one dominant feature, such as a small tree, fountain, or garden ornament. You wouldn't put all your favorite pieces of furniture in one room in the house, so why do it in the garden? "Don't show all your wares at one time," Smith says. "If you have more space, dedicate another favorite item to a different garden room."

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Water Feature

5. Include a water feature. Many city noises can be drowned out with the soothing sound of running or trickling water. Fish and aquatic plants add interest, but keep in mind that they also increase maintenance.

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Small Space, Gorgeous View

6. Consider the view. This applies to any garden, but is particularly important for in-town garden. "A small space is very personal and must look good from the inside out, not just the outside in," says Smith. "Consider a borrowed view—a wonderful focal point from the adjacent property. Pulling an outside focal point in like this can make a small space appear larger."

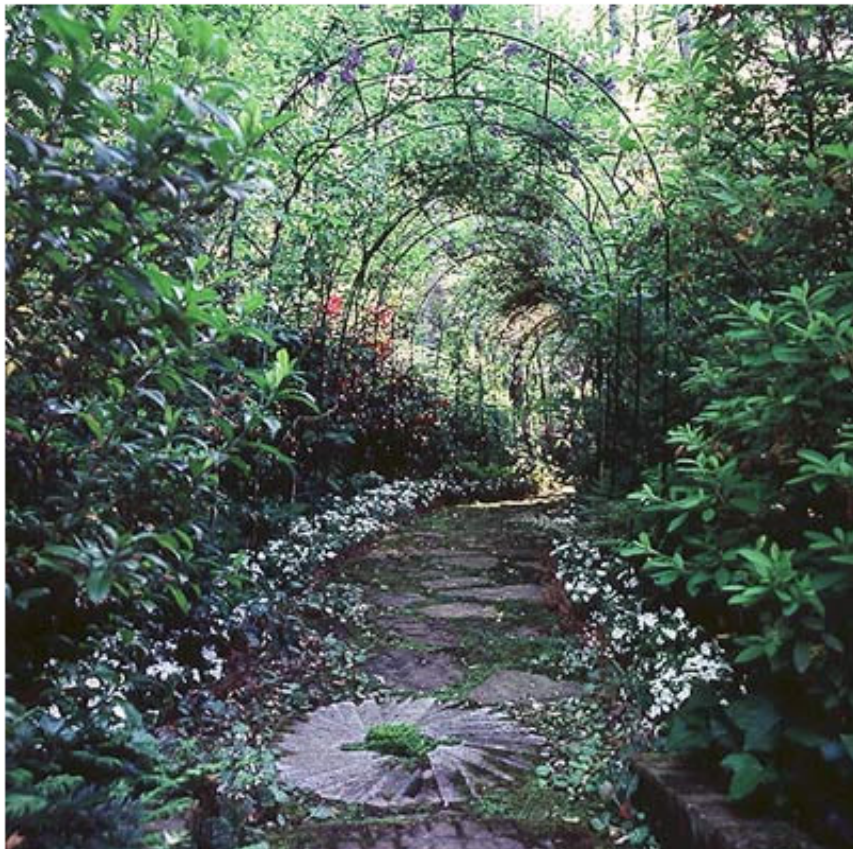
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Pathway Particulars

7. Create circulation carefully.

Walkways should be meticulously planned in any garden, but pay particular attention to them in smaller spaces. "Let the architecture of the house dictate the location and style of a walkway," says Smith. He advises making paths at least four to six feet wide, so that two people can walk comfortably side by side.

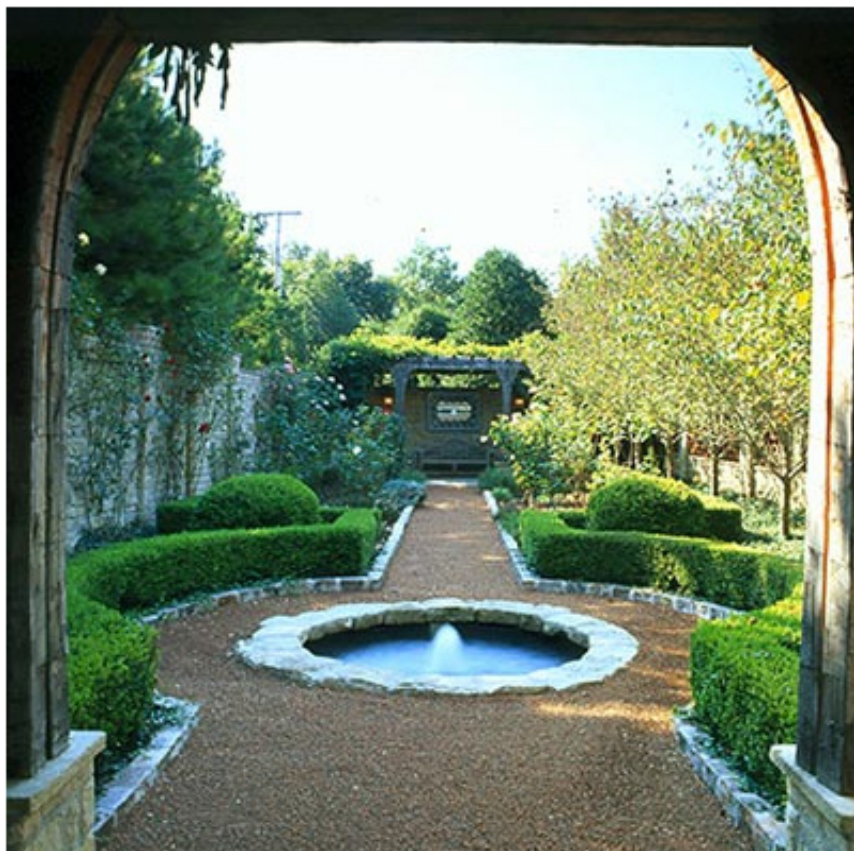
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Parterres

8. Plant parterres where appropriate. Parterres work anywhere from perfectly pruned castle grounds to a rooftop garden surrounded by skyscrapers. "They become powerful design elements in a small area, and they are the epitome of a simple, elegant garden design," Smith says.

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Focal Points

9. Highlight focal points. If you have a beautiful gate, tree, piece of statuary, or even a striking skyscraper in the distance, create a sight line leading toward it.

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Landscaping Choices

10. Match garden materials to those of the house. "Good landscape architecture is most harmonious with the house when similar materials are used in the construction," Smith says. One caveat: If your house is brick, avoid using the same brick on flat surfaces, such as walkways; bricks laid flat are subject to chipping when water freezes on them. Instead, choose paver bricks most like the color of the house.

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Design With Personality

12. And finally, design a garden with soul. Remember what you are trying to design and make sure everything in the garden has a purpose. "Evoke a feeling, so your friends leave fully satisfied," says Smith.

Resources: William T. Smith & Associates, Landscape Architects, 404/255-6786, www.williamtsmithgardens.com.

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The Drought-Resistant Garden

Atlanta landscape architect William T. Smith offers his top five tips for coping with dry times

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Photo: Van Chaplin: Purple coneflowers, Queen Anne's lace, and black-eyed Susans

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In the last few years, the South has experienced long periods of drought, leading to water rations and outright watering bans. Atlanta landscape architect William T. Smith offers suggestions for gardeners who are struggling in these dry times.

- 1. Rely on perennials and bulbs** during times of drought. Neither of Elizabeth Holt's two woodland gardens (see the March/April 2009 issue of *Southern Accents*) contains annuals.
- 2. Keep it simple.** Match the plant to the location in the garden. Choose plants that are likely to thrive under specific conditions. Learn whether a plant prefers shade or sun, dry ground or wet, and you will never make the mistake of planting the wrong plant in the wrong place.
- 3. Realize you are going to have changes in growing conditions from season to season and year to year. Plan ahead.** Some perennials are tough as nails and can survive better than others. Good choices are false indigo, stokesia, gaura, dusty miller, coneflowers, goldenrods, daylilies, Siberian irises, patrinia, and lupines.

4. You can get an incredible bounty of flowers from woody shrubs such as clethra, fothergilla, sweetspire, viburnum, chaste trees, spiraea, weigela, bluebeard, fringe trees, deutzia, quince, and mock orange. If you drive out in the countryside, you will see huge, old bushes that have stood the test of time with absolutely no care.