

A lush garden scene featuring a dirt path leading through various plants. On the left, there are vibrant orange lilies. In the background, a white picket fence is visible, partially covered by pink flowers. The overall atmosphere is bright and verdant.

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The BIG Book of GARDEN DESIGN

**Simple Steps to
Creating Beautiful Gardens**

Garden Styles

A garden may have a certain character or style, just as houses do. Styles have historical associations, but they are also influenced by regional cultures and growing conditions. Your first consideration should be to keep the style of your garden in harmony with that of your house. Next, take into account climate, soil, and the lay of the land. In fact, many popular garden styles have developed over the years specifically to address regional environmental conditions.

But the style you choose should not be the result of practical considerations alone. It should reflect your taste, your sense of beauty, and your desires. Thus you might decide to have one style of garden in the front yard—a formal one, perhaps—and a totally different look for the side or back yard, where you entertain or where your children play. The garden types described here are only an indication of the range of possibilities.

Formal and Informal Gardens

A house with a strong classical design calls for the strong axes and crisply defined focal points of a formal garden. Building materials such as brick or stone block look appropriate in a formal setting. Formal gardens are boldly geometric in structure. Straight lines, simple curves, precise angles, and sharp edges all contribute to a formal feeling. Symmetrical pairings mirroring each other and framing a central feature—such as two roses pruned into standards flanking a garden sculpture; carpet planting of a single type of plant; and ornate pruning are all elements of a formal design.

Despite this rigidity, formal gardens come in great variety and include rose and herb gardens, flower beds arranged like mosaics, water gardens that reflect the sky in yet another kind of symmetry, and walled vegetable gardens called potagers. Their strong ground plans are easy to read, and they retain a presence even in winter's landscape.

If you like the formal look but only up to a point, you can soften the formal geometry with a cascade of wisteria or a climbing rose on a wall or with a naturalistic planting of herbaceous perennials that billows over a border's straight edge. This softening of the formal style became the basis for the traditional English cottage garden, typically a charming, informal mix of annual and perennial

blossoms set within a well-defined garden space.

During Colonial times, American houses had cottage or dooryard gardens that were similar to their English cottage counterparts, with a profusion of flowering plants blooming in beguiling disarray on either side of the front door and along the front of the house. Today, a more structured version of the dooryard garden has become the most popular American landscape style—an informal garden with a somewhat loose, natural appearance featuring irregular or compound curves. But this is not laissez-faire gardening. The style calls for crisply defined beds forming a strong ground pattern. Planting arrangements, though not usually symmetrical, are carefully balanced. Brick, stone, and concrete effects borrowed from the house are built into paths and walls.

The axes and focal points in an informal garden are subtler and the patterns less regular than in a formal arrangement. They may exist naturally on your land, needing only a little emphasis from you to bring them out. Or a focal point might be implied by making a clearing in a line of trees, and the axis leading to it may be no more than an irregularly spaced line of shrubs.

In addition, the mechanism for framing a focal point by bracketing it will be more naturalistic than in a formal garden. For example, rather than balancing two identical clipped shrubs on either side of a focal point, you might achieve an informal balance with a small conifer and a clump of soft foliage to one side and a large rock on the other. The two masses may be equivalent in visual weight, but their textures and forms are quite different.

Japanese-Inspired Gardens

The Japanese-style garden blends some of the principles of formal design—strong, clean lines, for example—with the asymmetry of the informal garden. Each element is carefully chosen to achieve an exquisite effect—a rock is placed just so, a tree is sited to weep over a pool and be reflected in the water, the sinuous motion of a stream is captured in the flowing bends of a path.

The plants and building materials in a Japanese garden reflect a fine attention to detail and are generally kept to a small scale. The emphasis is on the texture and form of plant foliage, rock, and wood, with occasional splashes of flower color.

Enclosed by a low hedge of Japanese holly, this Atlanta, Georgia, parterre—four rectangular beds laid out in a carpetlike pattern—lends a formal accent to the stone steps leading up to the back garden. Wall germander outlines the central beds, which are filled with red wax begonias surrounding a pot of trained ivy.



Regional Gardens

Regional garden designs reflect local climate and growing conditions. They incorporate native plants best suited to that environment and include structural elements, such as walls and water features, that temper the effects of the weather.

Desert gardens thrive in extremes of drought and heat. A desert is not hot all year round, but it is dry, with annual rainfall of less than 10 inches. Plants grow low to the ground, and trees are spaced widely to conserve water. A desert garden follows that model, using plants like prickly pear, ocotillo, and spiky yucca. Trees such as carob, acacia, and common olive have deep taproots to

reach underground water, and cast cooling shade. High courtyard walls and sun-screening trellises help moderate the heat and glare.

Mediterranean gardens are a variation on the desert garden. Originating in the arid climate of Spain, North Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean, they have transplanted easily to California and the American Southwest. Suited to contemporary, stucco, or Spanish-style houses, these gardens nestle in the shelter of a courtyard or an atrium. The plantings can be lush, featuring exotically colored and scented tropical trees such as citrus, banana, and palm, all surrounding a central fountain. Vines such as jasmine and bougainvillea climb the garden's walls, and ferns, hibiscus, oleander, and bird-of-paradise grow in pots and raised beds.

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