1. GARDEN DESIGN INFLUENCES

OVERVIEW

In this module, we discuss the following topics:

- Sources of influence in garden design
- Influence of garden history
- Fashions and trends
- Impact of television
- The principles of design
- Movement
- Direction
- Rhythm
- Unity and balance
- Using colour to influence your design

THE SOURCES OF INFLUENCE IN GARDEN DESIGN

Gardens can take many forms. Even if you’re designing for the same client, and following the same specifications, you should be able to produce several plans, each very different from the last.

Give another designer the same task, and the chances are they will produce yet more variations.

In this module we will look at the process of creating a garden. We’ll consider what inspires designers to do what they do, where they get their ideas from, and what influences they look to.

Sources of influence can be broken down into the following three categories:

- Garden history
- Fashions and trends
- The principles of design
THE INFLUENCE OF GARDEN HISTORY

Looking to gardens of old reminds us of the importance of function in design. In other words, earlier people used gardens for a purpose: they weren’t simply decorative. It also helps to look at more recent garden styles from the 16th century onwards, to see why we like lawns or flower beds.

ANCIENT GARDENS

Gardens are as old as time itself, and are central to one of the world’s oldest books, the Old Testament:

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food. ...And the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it.

So there you have it. Gardening is the world’s oldest profession.

But after Eve ate the apple, the pair were exiled to be gardeners in poor quality, unimproved land:

Cursed is the land for thy sake; in sorrow shall thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.

All this shows that gardening and horticulture were important to ancient Jewish people.

NORMAN AND MEDIEVAL

In Norman times, the open land within the castle walls was tended as a garden by the ladies of the estate. In times of war, these gardens would be abandoned, and everyone would move into the castle. So the gardens formed an open space where an enemy couldn’t hide.

In medieval times, the monks tended monastic gardens. This was partly for the solitude and contemplation that gardening and gardens can give; and partly because the garden produced food for the monastery.

The story of the Garden of Eden also influenced the monks. They felt a garden brought them closer to God.
In addition, the monastery gardens were the repository of knowledge of herbal medicine. So they had a functional use.

The earliest gardening book, *The Feate of Gardening*, dates from about 1400. It mentions over 100 plants, and gives instructions on sowing and planting, and the grafting of trees. It also discusses the use of herbal medicine, including camomile, thyme and sage. Among the vegetables it mentions are turnip, spinach, leek, lettuce and garlic.

**ISLAMIC GARDENS**

In Islamic gardens, water was always a predominant feature. Waterways would weave their way around the space, and cascades and fountains were often included. It all looked very spectacular, but that wasn’t its main purpose.

These gardens were in the desert, an environment we don’t normally associate with lush vegetation. The controlled irrigation system provided by these man-made waterways, and the increased humidity provided by the cascades, allowed these people to grow more food.

The walls were there not just to be decorated with plants and murals, but were mainly to protect their crops from the elements, providing shade and shelter from the wind.

Hostilities between neighbours also required gardens to be fortified, to keep out marauding enemies and wandering animals. It’s easy to imagine how crude these structures must have been, when they were initially conceived.

As time went on and it became apparent the features were to be an integral part of the gardens, people wanted to use these features to enhance their appearance.

**ELIZABETHAN AND THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD**

By the early 16th century in the West, people were beginning to perceive gardens as somewhere to relax, in addition to growing food.

Elizabethan gardens introduced mazes and knot gardens (where different plants were separated by dwarf hedges). They also had statues and flowers.

The renaissance brought a new understanding of Roman and Greek civilisation, and they found that classical architecture was based on mathematical principles. This encouraged thinkers to lay out gardens that would be formal and harmonious. Nature was to be subjected to rational
planning. Influenced by these ideas, great gardens became formal and geometrical.

Across Europe, architects saw the classical designs of Palladio (around the 1550s), and these forms can be seen in temples at Stourhead and elsewhere.

By this time, the nobility didn’t need their gardens for safety or food production. They saw them as a means to demonstrate their wealth, and to improve the scenery.

This type of formal grand garden was popularised by the French nobility, with Le Notre being their best known designer.

Among the British aristocracy, young noblemen went on the grand tour around Europe, particularly Italy, and came back inspired with Greek and Roman ideas.

**BRITISH GARDEN DESIGNERS**

**Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown** (1716-1783) was one of the best known garden designers, and was appointed Royal Gardener at Hampton Court in 1764. He would create parks by smoothing the contours of the landscape, with the aim of making it gentle and harmonious. Stowe and Petworth are two of his works.

His landscapes had long avenues, serpentine lakes with no vegetation on the banks, sweeping lawns, formal walks and scattered clumps of trees. Everything had to look ‘natural’, even though this was an artificially induced nature. His landscapes often looked like fields.

**Humphrey Repton** (1752-1818) was a minor squire who advised members of the nobility on landscape design. He bound his thoughts and sketches in his famous Red Books, elegantly bound books; bound in red covers. He liked a smooth transition between the house and the natural landscape. This involved having a terrace near the house, a serpentine park in the middle distance, leading to a distant view. He also liked having a lane that followed a circuitous path around the estate, so that the family and guests could enjoy the changing landscape. He would also install a Palladian temple in the grounds.

But by the beginning of the 1800s, people had tired of formal layouts, and were seeking more interesting ‘natural’ shapes. They liked the idea of caverns, barren rocks, rugged trees, waterfalls, woods and valleys. This was known as savage scenery. People had discovered the untamed beauty of the Lake District, and liked ‘briars and brambles’. Brown’s work was seen to be too artificial and stiff.
THE VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN PERIOD

One influential writer was **J C Loudon**, a garden designer, horticultural journalist and publisher. He promoted the idea that agricultural workers should have an acre of land on which to grow food and keep pigs. Like the Quaker manufacturer philanthropists (such as Cadbury), he wanted to improve the lifestyle of ordinary working people, and he was influential in resurrecting the medieval idea of the cottage garden. Today’s cottage garden, with its unruly abundance of flowers, largely started with Loudon.

His "Encyclopedia of Gardening" (1822) recommended the use of many garden elements which we now take for granted: the rockery, shrubbery, glasshouse, rose garden and massed carpet bedding.

J C Loudon also designed public parks and places such as the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, which opened in 1832.

In prosperous Victorian times there was a big increase in the population, and a huge upsurge in house building. For the first time, many people had back gardens which they could cultivate for pleasure. The small suburban garden had arrived.

The Victorians took great pride in their manicured lawns and flower beds.

By the beginning of the 1900s, the Arts and Crafts movement began to hark back to the medieval period, and to the cottage garden with its profusion of flowers.

But others went for quiet formality. **Gertrude Jekyll** (1843-1932) was influential at the beginning of the 20th century. She liked ‘large, quiet spaces of lawn, unbroken by flower beds’. She preferred simple groupings of ‘noble species of hardy vegetation’, and liked to join ‘house to woodland’. She went for terraces and flights of steps. It should be noted that she was designing gardens of more than five hectares, and her own seven-hectare garden was managed by a staff of eleven men.

MODERN GARDENS

In recent years, there has been a tendency for abstract gardens, which are geometric in form, taking its cue from the cubist painters. Here plants are used to provide patches of colour, texture and shapes, to give form to the garden.
But as modernism has given way to post-modernism, gardens have begun to include bricks, stained timber and concrete. Gardens feature bright colours, lights, glass and plastics. And the popularity of TV programmes has meant that garden design has become accessible to all.

It’s unlikely that you’ll use a historic garden as a direct source for an idea. But you are likely to draw inspiration from proven past garden design techniques, and adapt them to suit today’s world.

**JAPANESE GARDENS**

The idea of bringing a small-scale representation of the natural world into a garden has long brought the Japanese the peace and tranquillity they sought.

Some Japanese gardens have a narrative. Walking around the garden leads you through man’s life, from birth and maturity to ultimate death.

A popular feature of most Japanese gardens was the deer scarer (Figure 1.1). This is a water-driven device which will overbalance when full of water and fall on to a rock, causing a loud bang to scare away the deer.

It was an essential item in Japan where the gardener did not want to keep out the deer by building high fences.

And this device has been the source of inspiration for many a water feature in modern-day English gardens. It’s not often used to scare away deer, but usually designed to create movement and sound in a garden.

Remember that a Japanese garden was built with a Japanese landscape and had specific needs in mind. So be sure to look at the concept behind your ideas, if you are borrowing techniques from yesteryear.

You will create a better landscape for your client by using the fundamental principals and adapting them to their needs.

You may, of course, be asked to include a Japanese bridge or pagoda in your design, purely because the client likes them, and that’s fine too. It’s their garden after all.
EXERCISE 1.1

Find out information about the following people:

Andre Le Notre
Andrea Palladio
Rev. William Gilpin

Find out information about the following places:

Hampton Court
Castle Howard
Chatsworth
Jardin des Tuilleries

If you're unsure how to do this, ask a librarian in a public library.
VISIT LOCAL GARDENS

It’s worth visiting local gardens in your area (and possibly further a field if local interest is limited).

Cast a critical eye over the different landscapes, and try and find out whom the garden was originally built for, and what its purpose was.

It can be a good way of seeing design techniques in action, and forming your own opinion as to how successful they have been.

Mature plant grouping can also be another source of inspiration, and can only be appreciated in established gardens. A garden can take many years to mature, as far as the planting is concerned. It’s a great help to see the plants as they were designed to appear, rather than trying to imagine it all at a nursery.

EXERCISE 1.2

Find out where the local gardens of interest are in your area and when it is best to visit them. You might start by contacting the local tourist information office or the RHS.

FASHIONS AND TRENDS

Garden design is currently influenced by two major things:

- Wider availability of materials
- Sociological trends

As the recent trend for 'Landscaped gardens' and 'Outdoor rooms' grows, so the design and variety of garden products improves. This allows the garden designer to be more adventurous, without having to worry about going over budget.

A visit to your local builders merchant or DIY store will tell you what is locally available, and a letter to the major manufacturers will ensure you keep up to date with new products.

But don’t be seduced by a great-looking product, and using it for the sake of fashion. Block paving is a classic example. When it was first released and people started using it in gardens, it was a welcome break from concrete and tarmac.
It was so different that many new driveways, patios and paths were installed without much thought to design. The fact that it was different and exciting seemed reason enough to use it. But a few years on, many clients have grown bored with it.

Block paving is certainly a versatile material, and it has a place in the landscape. But with a little more design input, you can create timeless landscapes instead of ones that look tired within a few years.

If a garden’s main function is for rest, relaxation and socialising, it may be undesirable to use materials that your client sees everyday at their place of work, the local supermarket or garage forecourt.

This also applies to planting. As the trend for landscaping business parks, out-of-town shopping complexes and public areas becomes more popular, some of the more versatile trees and shrubs become overused and commonplace, instead of the little gems they once were. An example of this is the Japanese Cherry.

**IMPACT OF TELEVISION**

Television has a huge impact on the way in which people use their gardens.

From the early Eighties, more people have realised that they have a plot of ground beyond their back door that could be quite a useful space.

Now that the trend for growing your own food has waned, people are seeking to use the space for more recreational purposes.

The many gardening programmes specialising in the 'instant garden' have increased the general interest in this area. Not only do these programmes inspire the general public to do something with their garden, they’re a great way for a garden designer to share in the experiences and techniques of their colleagues.

**THE INFLUENCE OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN**

When designing a garden, there are generally agreed principles that work. This is either because they’re practical, or else they have a form that provokes human beings in various ways.

When dealing with space, you need to add structure to the area. Human beings like to categorize things, and splitting a space up into areas helps to satisfy this basic need.
The areas don’t need to be physically separated, although this can be used very effectively. For example, leading someone from a small area into a larger area will make that area seem larger than it really is.

A suggested change in use, or a subtle change in shape, can also be used effectively, and this may be all that is needed.

As the area is divided up, you will create patterns and forms in the garden. It is important that from these patterns you suggest:

- Movement
- Direction
- Rhythm

Movement is about encouraging the client to go out into the garden, by making it welcome and easy to navigate. Ground patterns and pathways lead people into a garden. Steps will also generate movement in a garden.

The direction somebody is looking in doesn’t necessarily need to be the direction they’re physically walking. You can often create pleasing vistas from certain viewpoints. It’s usual to have a sense of direction and movement when entering a garden whether from a gate into the garden from another outside space, or from inside the house.

Yet it’s often equally important to lead the eye within the garden, from a viewpoint such as a house window.

Rhythm is achieved by giving the movement a sense of speed. By changing the rhythm, you can create ‘resting places’ in the garden for both the eye and physical movement.

Using colour strategically across the garden can also be used to achieve movement and rhythm. The eye will connect the similar colours, and move from one to the next.

**interrupting the rhythm**

Look at Figure 1.2. By changing the width of the path leading up to the focal point, the eye stops at the cross before continuing on to the focal point.
**USING COLOUR TO DRAW THE EYE**

Figure 1.3 shows how colour can be used to dictate the movement of the eye.

On the left hand example, we are using a strong colour over a less significant one, so the eye moves diagonally across the box. This is so the shapes have no coordination or unity. By inverting the colours in the right hand box, we see that the eye still moves diagonally across the box but much more slowly this time.

![Figure 1.2 Interrupting the Rhythm](image)

**EXERCISE 1.3**

Look at your garden, or someone else’s. Are there any examples of movement, direction and rhythm?

**UNITY AND BALANCE**

Unity is a term we use to mean the total impact of the design; it refers to the whole picture.

Our final design must look 'right'. To help achieve this, we must try to use shapes, colours and textures that compliment each other. In other words,
they must agree with one another, and help draw attention to focal points in the garden.

**Figure 1.3. Using Colour to Draw the Eye**

**Exercise 1.4**

In Figure 1.3, how many of the blocks in the left hand box could you change to red, before the shapes gave no meaning at all and become just a jumble of different shapes?

We’ll be covering colours later in this module. So for now we will take shapes as an example.

In Figure 1.4a, we can see that the shape used is in the wrong place. It does not unify with the house at all.

Figure 1.4b shows a better composition, linking house and garden very well. At this stage we only need worry about shapes. What they are going to be in real terms comes later.

To be perfectly unified, everything in the garden would have to be the same. This would lead to a very boring and predictable garden, lacking in anything interesting.

To combat this, we need to introduce variety. Variety can be subtle, becoming more complex until it becomes chaotic and loses its unity.
ACHIEVING BALANCE

We achieve balance in a garden by dividing the visual weight of the garden equally.

That is to say; while everything in the garden has a visual impact, some things will be more eye catching than others. And to satisfy the human sense of order we must try to achieve an equal balance across the garden.

As we saw earlier, many Renaissance gardeners sought to achieve symmetrically balanced landscapes, especially in the formal grounds of grand houses.

Symmetrical balance is achieved when a space can be divided across the middle and has the same design on both sides; rather like a mirror image.

If you don’t want to have a formal symmetrical garden, but you do want to keep things in balance, this is still possible using asymmetrical balance.

If you imagine the area as being like a set of old-fashioned scales, a large weight goes on one side and you use a selection of smaller weights on the other side to balance it out. This concept works equally as well for visual weights as it does for physical weights.

The garden in Figure 1.5 shows how the garden is balanced by using a combination of smaller plants to offset the dominant trees that are already
established in the garden.

**FIGURE 1.5 ASYMMETRICAL BALANCE**

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**EXERCISE 1.5**

Look at your garden, or someone else’s. Does it have unity, symmetry or balance? Could your improve it, or make the design stronger?

**USING COLOUR TO INFLUENCE YOUR DESIGN**

The eye is very perceptive of colour. A subtle change in colour is all we need to direct the eye through and punctuate a design.

If we look at foliage, for example, you might think that most plants have green leaves.

But even the colour green comes in many shades; these various shades can be noticeably different from one another if used side by side.
**EXERCISE 1.6**

Look in your garden for plants of different colour. Describe the colour of the overall appearance of some plants and list them. For example, you might have a rusty red rose bush or lavender coloured wild bluebells.

**ASYMMETRICAL BALANCE**

Foliage isn’t the only feature that gives a plant its colour. Bark can also play an important role, especially during the winter months when some plants will lose their leaves (deciduous), leaving just a framework of branches to provide interest.

The influence of colour in design is based on the way in which human beings respond to it. It’s also about the perceived relationships between colours.

There is a collection of accepted terms to describe these relationships. And understanding them will be a great help when it comes to making good use of colour.

The following descriptions are based on the colour wheel, an age-old device that visually displays the relationship between colours.

![Figure 1.6 The Colour Wheel](image-url)
CONTRASTING COLOURS

Any two colours opposite each other on the colour wheel are known as contrasting. In the trade, they are known as ‘complementary’ colours.

In design, if you have an overpowering amount of one colour, the best way to lessen its impact is by using its complement to create a more balanced composition.

The impact of having too much green in a landscape could be lessened with the use of splashes of red to attract the eye. Orange can be offset with blue and yellow with violet etc.

Split complementary colours are sometimes used as a more subtle approach. This is achieved by selecting the complementary colour, and then moving one place to the left or right of it and using that to complement the first colour.

So, rather than using blue to complement orange, you might use blue-green. This is quite hard to achieve with planting, as you might imagine. But it’s worth considering if you are going to stain or paint wooden structures.

RELATED OR HARMONISING COLOURS

Harmonising colours are one or two places to each side of your colour. So, yellow and green are harmonious.

EXERCISE 1.7

In your workbook, state two other sets of harmonising colours.

Compositions in your design using these colour combinations will almost be unavoidable. These appear frequently in nature, and represent the blending of colours that are almost the same but not a true match.

Thus a garden full of green need not be overpowering. Use of harmonising colours will promote colour harmony.
TRIADIC COLOUR SCHEME

A triadic scheme uses three colours, each at 60 degrees to each other.

You can identify these colours by selecting one colour, and then drawing an equilateral triangle from it.

The colours that are touched by the points of the triangle have a relationship with your chosen colour.

Blue, yellow and red for instance have a relationship. Orange, green and violet are also linked. This relationship is based upon purity of colour. When you’re trying to achieve balance in a scheme, bear this method in mind. If you have an overabundance of green in a scheme, try using purple or orange with it. You don’t have to use both colours to achieve the effect: one is often enough.

COLOUR WARMTH

You may have often heard of people talking of colours being hot or cold. Red and orange are considered to be warm, probably because of their association with the sun or fire. Likewise, blue is considered a cold colour because of its association with ice and water.

These are very common conceptions. But it must be remembered that a colour’s warmth is only really evident when compared with another colour.

For example a greenish blue would be said to be a cold colour, but may seem warmer if compared with a violet blue.

NOW WATCH A VIDEO

A short history of garden design
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zay7_2KmQ0

SUMMARY

1. You can now identify the sources of influence when it comes to garden design.
2. You have an understanding of how garden history, fashions and trends, and television have influenced garden design.
3. You know how to apply the basic principles of design, incorporating movement, direction and rhythm.
4. You realise the importance of unity and balance in garden design.
5. You have learnt how to effectively use colour to influence your design.
**TODAY'S TASK**

**WRITE AN ESSAY ON THE HISTORY OF GARDEN DESIGN.**

For this task, you will need some source material. Go to your library, and find some books on the subject. Look in encyclopaedias, and in the gardening section. Either borrow the books, make notes, or photocopy some pages.

Your survey should start in medieval gardens, or even earlier. It should include Tudor, Georgian and Victorian ideas on gardening. And you should include important people in gardening such as Gertrude Jekyll.

Try to include information not already mentioned in this Module.

The essay should be 2-4 pages long, depending on the size of your handwriting or your computer typeface.

The aim of this essay is to give you a perspective on how gardens have developed, and the influences that affect today’s gardens.
ANSWERS AND COMMENTS TO EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1.1

You may find that researching this list of people and places will be useful in the future. Keep hold of any notes you have made for reference later on.

EXERCISE 1.2

It's always helpful to have a shortlist of 'gardens to visit' handy so that when you get time you can go along and see the work of other garden design professionals in real life and perhaps some good examples of mature planting. Don't forget your camera!

EXERCISE 1.3

Only you will know whether you have examples of movement and rhythm. If not, perhaps you should think about including some. Otherwise your garden may seem unduly static.

EXERCISE 1.4

You need to experiment a little on this exercise. It gives you practical experience in groupings and massing, which is useful in planting and hardscapes (paths and sheds etc). There is no correct answer to this question. It's an exercise to point out that humans like to see decisive pattern in things.

EXERCISE 1.5

Only you can tell whether your garden has unity or symmetry. If it hasn’t, your garden may seem a little unfocused.

EXERCISE 1.6

We just wanted to get you thinking about the various colours you have seen in planting whilst out and about. There is not really a 100% correct solution to this question. There may be a few incorrect colours but generally as you
will see in the following section on the colour wheel there are a multitude of colours, which can be represented using plants.

**Exercise 1.7**

Other sets of harmonising colours include:

- Blue and blue-green
- Blue and green
- Yellow and orange