

LESSON 1

GARDEN DESIGN & YOU



About Your Course

Beginning a garden design course is a positive step in taking control of how you plan and create your garden. It can also be the first step towards a garden design business if this is what you want to do.

Your course is designed in easy to follow lessons, with some optional self assessment exercises along the way to ensure you understand the areas covered. The course also has three tutor marked assignments, to be marked and commented on by your tutor. This is to help you really understand areas covered and to ensure you can put the knowledge into practice. On successful completion of the assignments you will be awarding with the Distance Learning Centre Garden Designer Certificate.

Whether you want to go into business eventually or simply design gardens for yourself, friends and family, this course will help you to understand the processes involved and learn new skills as well as develop those you already have.

It takes you from the very start of the design process, from learning about how gardens have developed, how to approach and analyse a site, right the way through to full designs. You will learn how to create initial sketches, scale drawings, and how to develop presentation skills helping you to design for particular groups. We shall look at colours, shapes and form, site analysis and assessment, functional layout plans (FLPS), master plans, insets, construction plans, elevations, sections and many other areas.

We shall also look at the horticultural potential of a site and the importance of soil. You can, if you want to, create a portfolio of your work to use as examples to show potential clients or just for your own use and enjoyment.

For whatever reason you choose to take this course, garden design opens up a world of opportunity and allows you to see gardens in a new light.

Introduction

To design a garden, you need to understand how you will approach a site.

To some a 'garden designer' mows the lawn, digs a couple of flower beds and plants flowers. Others think they come up with a working plan, construct the features, create new beds, re-shape and re-model.

Others imagine them as some arty 'Maurice' who virtually lives in the garden, commenting on every move the owner makes...

"Oh, my dear, yellow there with the pink? Oh, no, no, no!"

In fact garden designers are none of these types (well, most of us aren't) and yet a combination of them all. We are people who have:

- A professional, practical attitude.
- An eye for detail.
- Imagination.
- A respect and love of the flora of the land.
- Good listening skills to ascertain what the people using the garden want, whether this is our household or potential clients.
- Some knowledge of what will work where.
- A desire to work with people to get the best from their garden, no matter what size or budget.

Good gardens are created, they don't just happen. **How** they are created is due to their design.

A well designed garden will be more than just a piece of land. It will provide somewhere which is both aesthetically pleasing and practical. Whether for a business or private individuals, the garden will be an extension of their character and living space. They will provide a joy and some surprises as well as simply make people feel good.

How Gardens Started

To understand how garden design has developed it is important to have an understanding of how gardens started.

How did we get from a functional, food producing piece of land to a garden to relax in and enjoy as well?

So many things influence garden design now, from current trends to the latest show gardens but all these would be nothing without influences and ideas from the past.

The Beginnings

The way plants were grown was originally limited by the soil and climate of that area, because transporting materials over long distances was not feasible. So, specific types of gardens evolved in particular places of the world, influenced by locally available materials. For example, gardens in hot, dry climates provided shade as relief from the heat and dust.

The preserve of the rich, these gardens often were based on a symmetrical design around water and include the Moghul gardens of the Far East like the Taj Mahal. People used local materials, and plants that were native to that climate and country.



Different cultures developed different styles based on their location and beliefs. Chinese and later Japanese gardens included nature and this was reflected in small scale with mounds of stones representing mountains, dry rivers representing rivers and raked sand representing the deserts.

Miniature trees and plants reflected the massive forms found in nature and the gardens reflected the calm, enlightenment seeking beliefs of their religions. Many Eastern gardens tell a man's life story through the design of the garden.

Greek and Roman gardens developed and included statues to please the gods and bring blessings on their land and households.

The development of garden design reflects demographic changes and cultural development too. Different cultures developed their gardens at different times.

As the West developed industrial techniques like glass houses, and machinery like lawn mowers, so the opportunity to grow exotic plants in the UK increased and large swathes of lawn could be maintained easily.

Later, largely due to the trade in coffee, tea and spices, people found ways to transport seedlings and seeds to other countries. Exotic and rare plants became valuable currencies and as well as traded plants, people began to introduce ornamental plants and flowers.

Orangeries became fashionable in which to grow exotic plants and fruit and the pineapple became a symbol of hospitality displayed on top of railings and grown in glass houses as they denoted status and wealth.

The Wardian case (a mini-greenhouse used for transporting live plants) meant that plants could be brought back safely from far flung places and would survive the arduous and long sea journeys. Botany and horticulture developed as sciences, plants were understood, analysed, classified and their climatic needs reflected in different growing areas, ensuring their survival in their new homes.

Some gardens were reserved for particular uses. For instance, many monasteries had an apothecary garden in the grounds where plants for medicinal use were grown. A large mansion often had herb and vegetable gardens where plants were grown for use in the kitchens.

Formal gardens were built around some of the great houses, the importance of these being the human element in them with their walkways, terraces and mazes where people could socialise and meander. They were, of course, also places in which to display wealth and opulence. As it became less important for the ordinary person to grow their food needs at home, they turned to gardens for decorative use.

Garden plants from around the world travelled to other countries and were successfully grown. In England, particularly during Queen Victoria's reign there was a massive influx of plants from abroad, and the Victorians had a particular fascination with producing hybrids and new breeds. Patrons provided money and ships for plant hunting expeditions and institutions like Kew Gardens became established as centres for plant collections, research and the development of knowledge.

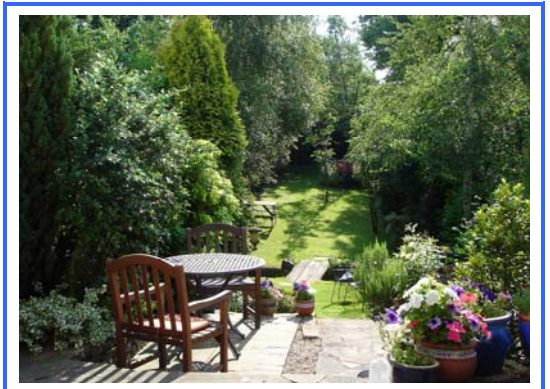
With the potential wealth from plants, sponsors funded journeys by plant hunters like David, Wilson and Fortune who journeyed to far flung corners of the World to find and bring back new specimens. There are plants today named after these great plant hunters such as *Davidia involucrata* (The Handkerchief Tree).

The Garden Today

The garden remains an important addition to a house, whether the garden is big or small, designed on a grand scale or simpler lines. It may be a small roof terrace or veranda, patio garden or rolling acres but it serves a purpose.

People have different needs from a garden. A garden can be:

- To escape from the pressures of life
- A recreational space
- A showpiece – a business, for example, may want a space which gives a message about their business or simply provide a pleasant frontage. Some people want a real show stopper of a garden.
- Another 'room'- somewhere to entertain in summer, for example or an extension of their living space.
- Somewhere to exercise their artistic abilities
- Some people want to tame nature into formal lines with a strong personal stamp on their piece of land, whereas others want to feel as if nature is almost coming through the door (and this effect can be just as difficult to design for!).



As well as what people want from a garden there is also what they *need*. They may need:

- A safe area for children or pets to play.
- To grow vegetables and fruit.
- Access for wheelchairs or elderly people.
- An enclosed area for pets, chickens or other activities.
- Security and safety.

The list of different needs and wants from a garden is endless.

Exercise:

Think about your own garden or a garden you know. Make a list of things which might be wanted from this garden. Then create a small list of needs which people might have. Include any of the above factors and some original ones if you can.

Designers

Many people have made their name as garden designers. Probably the greatest plantswoman was Gertrude Jekyll, who was the first gardener to investigate the colour relationships of flowers and foliage.

Originally an artist, she had an eye for detail and would even pick out the colour of the inner petals of one flower and use flowers with outer petals in the same colour next to them providing a subtle yet definite link.



Since early this century many of her favourite plants have been hybridised (a hybrid is the result of the crossing of two or more different varieties or species) to produce even better characteristics and it is possible to interpret her ideas in modern ways. She worked often with Lutyens, an architect some years her junior but together they created houses and gardens which were closely related and linked to create personalised and beautiful living spaces.

Although she died in 1932 the revolution Gertrude Jekyll brought about in gardening has influenced garden designers to the present day. She developed the concept of the herbaceous border which is still used today. Other designers who had a big impact on design were William Kent, 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton.

Once gardens, as such, were the realm of the wealthy but towards the end of the last century gardens became possible for everyman. House building in Victorian times escalated and the resulting urban spread included many more buildings with small gardens. More people could design their own little patch to be distinctive from their neighbour's.

Also, due to the continued improvements in hot-houses, greenhouses and horticultural techniques many more species became viable here. At the same time, some of the greatest plant collectors such as Joseph Hooker, Thunberg and Charles Sargent had provided more new material which was bred and added to the ever increasing number of plants which could be cultivated in Europe and the UK.

Exercise:

Read about some important designers like Capability Brown, Repton or Kent and discover how important they were for garden design in the UK. If you can, also find out about some of the plant hunters like Hooker, Wilson and others (these make fascinating reading and put other explorers in the shade).

This will allow you to really understand the importance of these designers and plant hunters to garden design today.