

# GARDEN MAKEOVERS

A *Gardenlife* special feature

**DIY OR CALL IN  
THE EXPERTS?**  
We give you the low-down

**JOE SWIFT'S  
PLANTING AND  
DESIGN PACKAGE**

**6** MAKEOVER  
OPTIONS FOR  
EVERY BUDGET

**BE INSPIRED**  
3 real-life stories

Your complete guide to doing up the garden

# contents

If you want to revamp a border or make over your entire garden, our design special is full of great ideas to inspire you and practical advice to get you started. Just pick the option that suits you best

\* **BUY A READY-MADE BORDER**

Discover the best professional, off-the-shelf options

\* **GO BACK TO SCHOOL**

Learn how to do it yourself

\* **BY EMAIL**

Get ready-made plans and advice at a bargain price

\* **BRING IN THE PROFESSIONALS**

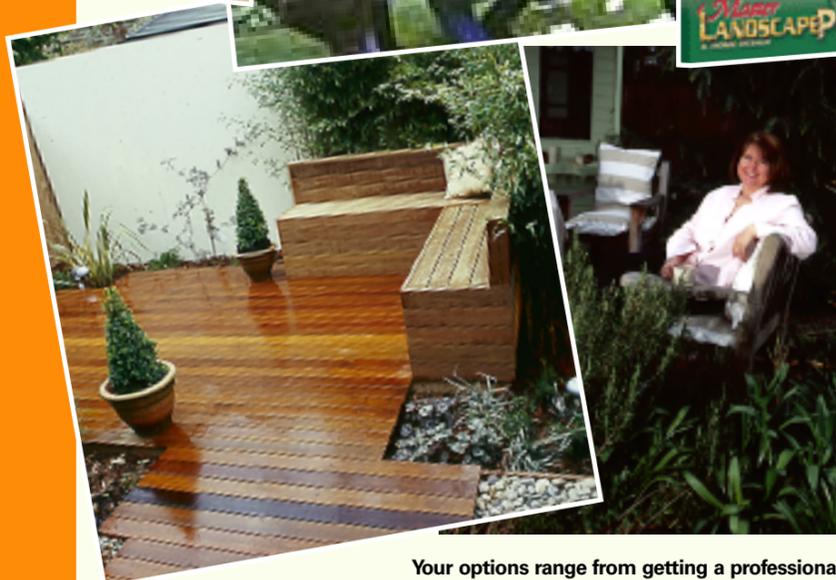
They'll plan and build the garden of your dreams, and it's more affordable than you think

\* **FIXED-COST DESIGN**

It's great to know from the outset how much you're going to spend

\* **USE A COMPUTER PACKAGE**

Try your hand with a CD-ROM



Your options range from getting a professional designer in to do all the work for you, to a hands-on, DIY approach with a CD-ROM

PHOTOGRAPHS: JONATHAN GREGSON, OBJECTIVE IMAGE, SARAH TURTON

# ACTION PLAN

If your borders are in need of a complete overhaul, there are several ways to give them the full professional treatment without spending an absolute fortune

**T**ransforming a garden can be a real juggling act. There are so many possibilities, it's often hard to know where to start. And even if you think you know exactly how you want your garden to look, there's an inevitable element of trial and error – a plant you think will look great alongside something else turns out to be too tall; a garden that looks fabulous in June may be boring and lifeless a few months later; or the row of clipped yew pyramids you'd thought would lead the eye down the garden actually blocks the view.

With so many pitfalls to catch out the unwary, how can you get your dream garden without wasting valuable time and money? Well, we've found lots of different ways of getting help with a new garden design – so see which one fits the bill for you, and get the process under way.

## Buy a ready-made border

If you don't have much gardening experience, the idea of redesigning even one border, let alone a whole garden, can be scary. So if you feel in need of some real hand-holding, an all-in-one, ready-made border package may be a good bet. You'll not only get a planting plan drawn up by a professional, but in some cases

you'll also be supplied with the plants as well – and it can work out to be really good value.

### THE GARDENING WEBSITE CROCUS

offers 18 themes to choose from, based on colour (Keep it Cool – blues, purples and pinks – and Red Summer, for example), planting styles (do you prefer leafy jungle or cottage garden?) or type of soil. Each design is clearly described on the website, and is accompanied by a coloured plan and a list (plus photos and care guide) of the plants used.

The cost of the borders varies, so you can choose one to fit your budget. At one end of the scale there's a Money's Tight option at £87.74 for a 3.5m x 2m (11ft 6in x 6ft 8in) site, which includes a ceanothus, Michaelmas daisies and Japanese anemones. At the other end you could spend £1,539.25 on an impressive Blow The Budget formal border for a sunny 3.5m x 2m (11ft 6in x 6ft 8in) site (a front garden, perhaps), which includes five box pyramids, 132 ordinary box plants, alliums and lavender. That may sound like a lot of money, but you'll get a border that's guaranteed to look good and you'll be saved wasted (and expensive) trips to the garden centre. (0870 787 1413/www.crocus.co.uk)

**Pros** You get a professionally designed plan and all the plants. Even the more expensive options are good value for money if you bear in mind how much you could waste on plant

combinations that don't work.

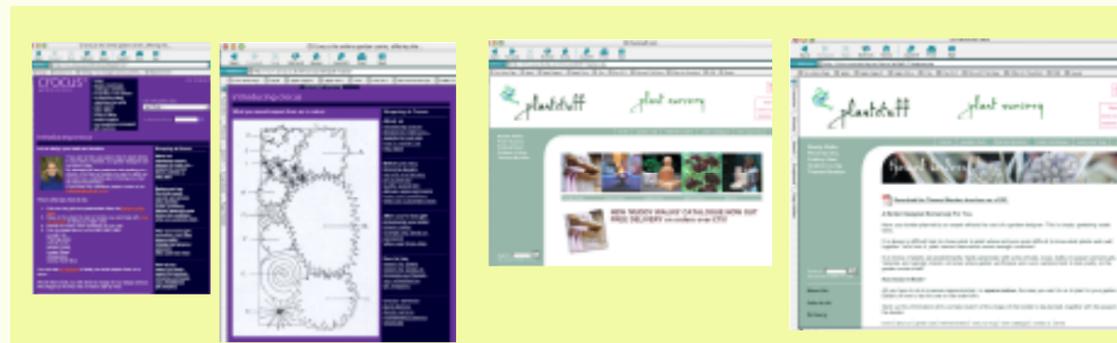
**Cons** The designs are for borders of pre-set sizes, so they won't necessarily fit your plot. **How much?** From £87.74

### PLANTSTUFF'S THEMED BORDERS

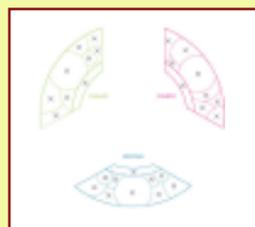
are a rather more personalised version of the ready-made border. You download an order form from the website, measure your border, draw a simple sketch of its shape on the grid provided, and note down the direction it faces and the type of soil you have. Then choose between six planting combinations – Country, Ice, White, Hot, Lemon and Heritage – and fire off an email.

They'll phone you back to talk through various possibilities, then you'll receive a design and planting plan in the post. The plans work on the 'planting by numbers' principle and come with correspondingly numbered plants, so you really can't go wrong, even if you don't know your penstemon from your astrantia. Themed Borders start at £75 for 2sq m (2sq yd) and for that you get a plan, at least nine two-litre plants, plus planting and care instructions. Beechwood plant labels, packaging and delivery are all included. (01373 812255/www.plantstuff.com)

**Pros** As close as you can get to a made-to-measure design without paying for a designer. **Cons** The designer doesn't see your garden and relies completely on your description. **How much?** From £75



Have a look online: at [www.crocus.co.uk](http://www.crocus.co.uk) you can choose from 18 ready-made border plans; at [www.plantstuff.com](http://www.plantstuff.com) you provide details of what you want, then you're sent a plan and the plants



There are various designs in the Bed in a Box range, but plants aren't part of the package

**BED IN A BOX** is a neat idea along the same lines, and it's exactly what it sounds like – you get a smart wooden briefcase containing a planting plan and an ingenious weed-suppressant template marked with crosses that show you exactly where to put the plants. However, what you don't get with this one is the plants. It's a foolproof idea, though. You lay the template on the ground and cut the cross-marks with scissors to give you an area big enough to dig a planting hole at each point. Then you simply cover the template with bark or gravel and, hey presto, a brand new flower-bed.

It's the brainchild of garden designer Jane Hamblin of Land Army Designs, and the plans she's come up with include The Quartern, for a 3m x 3m (10ft x 10ft) quarter or corner flower-bed, using plants such as purple sage, *Cistus* 'Silver Pink' and *Geranium psilostemon* to give a dusky pink, purple and magenta colour scheme. Alternatively, there's the Roundelay, for a 3m (10ft) circular bed, combining blues, yellows and whites with a splash of red, from plants

including *Geranium* 'Johnson's Blue', Jerusalem sage and *Hebe* 'Red Edge'.

And new this year are three different Herb Wheels. The Culinary wheel includes sorrel, French tarragon and rosemary; the Cosmetic version has *Rosa gallica* and *Iris* 'Florentina', while the Medicinal wheel includes lemon verbena and valerian. All three are 3m (10ft) in diameter and marked out with lavender. (08707 427656/www.bedinbox.net ✉)

**Pros** As well as the planting plan, you get a foolproof template that doubles as an effective weed suppressant.

**Cons** You have to buy the plants yourself – although you could grow some of them from seed or raise them from friends' cuttings.

**How much?** The Roundelay and the Quartern normally cost £55 each (plus £4.95 p&p), but *Gardenlife* readers can order either for just £45 (plus p&p). Each of the herb wheel designs costs £40, but *Gardenlife* readers can order them for just £32.50 (plus p&p) each. Call 08707 427656 and quote *Gardenlife*.



Simply plant through the Bed in a Box template then cover it with mulch



## Go back to school

If you'd like to come up with a design for your garden yourself but don't have the knowledge or experience to make the most of your space, why not enrol on a course to learn the basics?

**THE KLC SCHOOL OF DESIGN** in London offers a one-week full-time Introduction to Garden Design. The next one runs from 18-22 July and costs £587.50. (020 7376 3377/www.klc.co.uk)

**THE ENGLISH GARDENING SCHOOL**, also in London, has a four-day Planning and Planting workshop on 12-15 September. It costs £425. (020 7352 4347/

www.englishgardeningsschool.co.uk) **BURTON MANOR COLLEGE** in Cheshire will be holding a three-day Garden Design course on 16-18 September, covering measuring a site and producing a plan, as well as principles of design, themes and styles, and plant selection. The course costs £111 non-residential or £155 with accommodation. (0151 336 5172/www.burtonmanor.com)

**HOME STUDY** Or how about doing your studying at home? Putting in around 10 hours of work a week, the KLC's Be Your Own Garden Designer Open Learning course takes between eight and 12 months to complete and your work will be assessed throughout. It costs £250. (020 7376 3377/www.klc.co.uk)

**Pros** The satisfaction of doing it yourself. **Cons** However good the training, creating your own garden design is likely to be rather more hit and miss than if you get professional advice.

**How much?** This varies, depending on the length of the course.



Diana's bare plot was transformed into an elegant Mediterranean courtyard, using The Garden Planner

## Design by email

This one's a real bargain if you just need a basic garden plan to start you off. The Garden Planner gives you seven to choose from, including the Tranquil Garden, the Urban Garden and the Mediterranean Garden (see right). They're all based on award-winning designs by Geoffrey Whiten, whose work you may have seen at, for example, the Chelsea Flower Show.

For just £9.99 you get a detailed garden design by email with 12 pages of scale plans and advice. The plans are for a typical square plot that you can adapt for your own space. They come with photos so you can see what you're aiming for, as well as a detailed plant list and advice on constructing the garden and finding a landscaper. (0870 199 3412/www.thegardenplanner.com)

**Pros** A real bargain, if one of the ready-made plans is near to the garden you have in mind.

**Cons** The designs give you plenty of help with landscaping, and show where borders and trees should go, but you have to decide for yourself where the plants go (although the photos help). If your space is very different to the area on the plans, you'll need to adapt the plan accordingly.

**How much?** £9.99



THE GARDEN PLANNER WEBSITE provides 12 pages of plans, plant lists, advice and photos at a bargain price



I saw the design at Chelsea and fell in love with it Diana Ramsden

## CASE STUDY

A couple of years ago Diana Ramsden travelled from her home in Darlington on an organised trip to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. She'd recently moved in to a new house with a garden that was just a perimeter fence and a lawn, and she was looking for ideas to give it a drastic makeover.

'As soon as I walked in to the show,' says Diana, 'I saw my dream garden – a Mediterranean-style design by Geoffrey Whiten on the Goldfish Bank stand.'

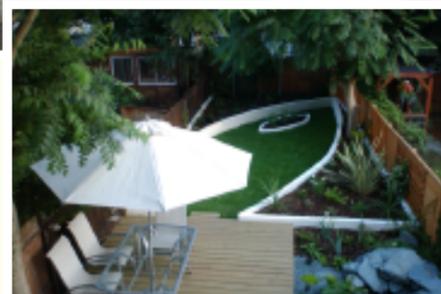
'I loved the unusual shape of the pond, the planting, the paving and the hot spa hidden away in an inner enclosure. I took away a leaflet about Geoffrey's company, The Garden Planner, and contacted them as soon as I got home. They have a selection of designs that they send out by email, but at that time the Mediterranean garden wasn't one of them. However, they said they'd be happy to draw it up for me as a one-off – and when I sent them the dimensions of my garden, it turned out to be almost exactly the same size, 18m x 14m (59ft x 46ft).

'Shortly afterwards a beautiful laminated plan arrived with photos of the garden at Chelsea and a list of the plants they'd used. We asked a local landscape contractor to do the work for us and he was able to carry it out with very few alterations to the original plan.'

'We discovered a nursery, Plants Of Special Interest (01709 790642/www.psinursery.co.uk), near Rotherham, that specialises in Mediterranean plants. Because we were placing a large order – from cannas, olives and lemon trees to abutilons and pelargoniums – they delivered them free of charge and planted them all up, copying the Chelsea photos.'

'Although our design cost a lot more than The Garden Planner's designs by email usually do, it was worth it. After all, it was designed by a Chelsea award-winner and we were the first people in the country to have it. And because it worked so well for me, they've now added the design to their email range.'

**The Garden Planner (0870 199 3412/www.thegardenplanner.com)**  
**Cost of design: in this case £275**



Katrina Wells has made the garden an extension to the house and incorporated a pond and an unusual diagonal lawn. The whole garden took just a week to construct

## Bring in the professionals

If you want ideas from someone who's been to see your garden for themselves, you need to hire a professional. But it needn't cost a fortune. True, a full design service can be expensive, but from around £300 you could have a half-day consultation with a designer, and then do the work and buy the plants yourself. You won't get a planting plan, but you should at least get an idea of what's possible on your plot.

Alternatively, for around the same fee, some designers will come up with a plan for just one border, which could give you a starting point for the rest of the garden. And, if your garden is small, a complete solution could be very affordable (see right). Shop around and look at different designers' websites – they usually show plenty of gardens they've created and you'll get a feel for their work, and often the cost too. Shortlist the ones you like, then chat to them on the phone before making up your mind.

For more information on finding a garden designer, contact the Society of Garden Designers (01989 566695/www.sgd.org.uk).

**Pros** A good designer will come up with ideas that you'd never have thought of yourself.

**Cons** If you go for a consultation only, you won't get a plan on paper. And if you opt for just one border, you'll have to do the rest yourself.

**How much?** A single border plan, half-day consultation or even a design for very small gardens can cost from around £300. A full package usually costs around 10 per cent of the overall cost of the project.



We wanted a design to link the garden with the house

Paul Sullivan and John Lear

### CASE STUDY

Paul Sullivan and John Lear bought their East London house from a developer who'd done a great job turning the interior into a light and airy contemporary space, but had made no attempt to tackle the garden.

'We started off by ringing round the designers in the *Yellow Pages*,' says Paul. 'But none had the sort of interesting ideas we wanted for our small 16m x 5m (52ft x 16ft) garden – until we met Katrina Wells from Earth Designs. She was very enthusiastic about the project and spent a lot of time talking to us about how the garden could work as an extension of the house, with the same feel inside and out.'

'We wanted a big area of decking for entertaining, which Katrina designed to lead out from the house, and I was very keen to have the sound of water in the garden, so she incorporated a waterfall and a pond filled with water lilies.'

'The fish-shaped lawn was Katrina's idea – a way of leading your eye up the garden to make it seem bigger than it really is. And there was such attention

to detail – even the gap between the eye and the outline of the fish was calculated to be exactly the width of our lawnmower!

'We've had to do very little to keep the garden looking good in the 18 months since it was finished. The rendered breeze blocks that outline the fish have been repainted to keep them looking pristine, and we've planted lots of bulbs.'

'We knew very little about gardening when we first met Katrina, but these days we're really enthusiastic. She's happy for us to ring and check with her if we see a new plant we like and want to add it to the garden – it's almost as if it's as much her baby as it is ours.'

'To start with, I was concerned that all the plants looked very small and there seemed to be quite a lot of bare soil, however Katrina told us to wait a year – and she was so right. Now everything's matured, it looks fantastic.'

**Earth Designs (020 8521 9040/  
www.earthdesigns.co.uk)**  
**Cost of design: £300**



We had no idea where to start

Jean Paterson

The sinuous cottage-style border designed by Andrew Fisher Tomlin is the focal point of the garden

### CASE STUDY

With all their time and energy taken up renovating their Victorian house in Twickenham, Middlesex, Jean and Craig Paterson had left their garden to its own devices for several years.

'We finally turned our attention outdoors,' says Jean. 'But my gardening experience was limited to a small courtyard, and now I was faced with a seriously overgrown 26m x 18m (85ft x 60ft) plot. I realised we needed help.'

Looking through garden design adverts, Andrew Fisher Tomlin's caught Jean's attention because he was offering to organise the plants and planting as well as coming up with a design. 'And as soon as I spoke to Andrew on the phone I was sure he was the right person for the job – we were on the same wavelength from the start.'

'To keep costs down, we wanted a design for just one wide border that would become the focal point of the garden. All I told Andrew was that I wanted a fairly traditional look, in keeping with the house. And I wanted cool colours – pale blues

and soft pinks; no garish oranges or reds. Other than that, I was happy to hear his suggestions.'

Andrew asked Jean and Craig to tear out pictures of gardens and borders that appealed to them from magazines, and brought a pile of garden books along to his first visit so they could point out what they liked. 'That was a really interesting exercise,' says Jean. 'Although I couldn't name many of the plants, I had a much better idea of what I liked by the end of it.'

The border Andrew came up with is wide and curvy, with a cottagey feel. He established early on that Jean and Craig were happy to have a mainly herbaceous border that dies back over winter, with only a few structural plants left behind. 'I like a breathing space, then it bursts back to life in spring,' says Jean. 'And I love that there are a few surprises, like the tall blue delphiniums that tower over everything else,' she says.

'We were really pleased with Andrew's design when we saw it on paper, but once everything was planted the reality



was, if anything, even better. At first I was worried it would involve lots of upkeep, but in fact we spend maybe a couple of hours a week in summer on it, pottering about to keep it looking its best, and then just a couple of days on a major tidy-up once a year. The overall effect more than repays us for what's really very little effort.'

Craig had one additional request – he wanted some fire in the garden. A barbecue was the obvious choice, and Andrew did indeed install one – but he also dug a fire pit and surrounded it with oak blocks to use as seats. 'It's great for sitting around in the evening and telling spooky stories,' says Jean.

**Andrew Fisher Tomlin (020 8542 0683/  
www.andrewfishertomlin.com)**  
**Cost of design: £400**



It's good to know the total cost from the start – Joe Swift talked through the options with client Seema Paterson, then the design, landscaping and planting were all completed to a set budget



## Fixed-cost design

**Joe Swift – presenter of *Gardeners' World* and *Small Town Gardens*** – is co-founder and director of Modular Garden and reckons they've come up with an ideal design solution. 'People are often put off by the cost of a full design package, especially as some designers work on an hourly basis so you don't know how much the project will cost until the end. Instead, we offer all-in-one packages at realistic prices that are fixed from the outset,' he says.

Form by Modular Garden is a streamlined service using top-class designers, overseen by Joe himself, which takes care of all the different components involved, from the design and planting plan, the hard landscaping materials and labour, to the plants themselves. The first consultation is free, and to guide you they offer a number of design options. For example, under Colour, you might choose hot, neutral or cool; for Use, the options are simple or flexible. The

service starts from around £6,000, and although that may sound like quite a lot of money, when you consider that it includes absolutely everything needed for your dream garden, it's really not bad.

One satisfied client is Seema Paterson, whose tiny backyard in west London used to be more of a dumping ground than an outdoor room. Whenever she saw a picture in a magazine of a similarly small space, she saved it – and realised that all the designs she liked were by Joe Swift. 'So we called Modular Garden, and asked what they could do for £6,000. We'd drawn up a list of everything we wanted, including decking, simple planting, corner seating and, most importantly, we wanted to make the narrow side return an integral part of the garden, not just an alleyway.'

The design Joe and his team came up with features gorgeous hardwood decking that runs crossways down the side return, to increase the feeling of space, and continues into the main

area. The corner seat is made in the same wood and the back wall has been painted in a pale shade to reflect light back into the garden.

The planting is simple but effective: black bamboo behind the seats gives some privacy, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Clematis armandii* climb the fence, and shadows from *Sambucus nigra* 'Eva' dance on the back wall. After making a couple of tiny changes to the initial design (clients have the option of one free redraw), Seema went on holiday for a week – and when she returned the garden was done. 'We're so pleased with it. It's such a transformation and we're out here all the time now,' she says.

**Pros** A bespoke service for a set price.

**Cons** Possibly a little less flexible than a more expensive service, but good value for money.

**How much?** From around £6,000

**Modular Design (020 7619 0100/ www.modulargarden.com)**

## Use a computer package

If you've got plenty of ideas about what you want to include in your garden, but are having trouble working out how and where to fit everything in, there are a number of CD-ROMs available to help you create the kind of CAD (computer-aided design) that professionals often use.

Hard-landscaping specialist **BRADSTONE** has an excellent version that allows you to plot the shape and size of your garden to scale on screen, then add beds, borders, ponds, decking and so on. You can change everything around as many times as you like and, once you're happy, simply print out your design. There's an extensive list of plants, the size and shape of which are all stored on the CD, and while you can't use it to see what different colours will look like planted together, it's a great way to organise your thoughts and get sizes and shapes plotted out. The program takes a while to load on to your PC for the first time, but once it's up and running you just need to take some time to read through the on-screen instructions and then you're ready to go. It costs £9.99 and is available by calling the Bradstone customer helpline on 01335 372289.

Rather more sophisticated, and consequently more complicated to use is

**MASTER LANDSCAPE PRO**. It allows you to design the planting as well as the landscaping and there's a photo library of thousands of plants, which you can select by name or by characteristics (ground cover or grasses, for example) before importing them into your design – and it'll even show you how the garden will look as the plants grow bigger!

You can view your finished design in 3D and look at it from different angles, and it's also possible to see where shadows will be cast – for example if you're thinking of planting a large tree, will it shade the house too much? Once you've mastered the basics, the program is quite quick and easy to use, and with so many features it's great value at £39.99. It's available from Fasttrak Software Publishing (01923 495540/ www.fasttrak.co.uk) or from PC World stores.

**Pros** You can play around with lots of different designs before you start work in your garden, and you can be sure in advance that it'll all fit.

**Cons** If you're not a real computer whizz, it may take a while to get to grips with how it works.

**How much?** From £9.99



**MASTER LANDSCAPE PRO** lets you see your design in 3D, from various angles, and you can even watch the plants grow to maturity

**BRADSTONE's** CD-ROM allows you to move the elements around with ease and print out a scale plan to follow – and it's a real bargain at just £9.99



## DESIGN IDEAS ON SHOW



If you're still stuck for design ideas, then head down to the **Malvern Spring Gardening Show** in Worcestershire from 13-15 May. *Gardenlife* is sponsoring the Interactive Design Theatre at this year's show, where visitors will get the chance to see behind the scenes of a garden makeover. Together, **Joe Swift** and **James Alexander-Sinclair** will question other garden designers,

discuss the practical side of growing and maintaining a garden, and relate their own experiences – both good and bad. **Alan Titchmarsh** will answer questions from the audience on Friday, and **Chris Beardshaw** takes to the stage on Sunday.

### How to book

For tickets, which cost from £9.50 pre-booked and £15 on the door, call 01684 584924 or go to [www.threecounties.co.uk/springgardening](http://www.threecounties.co.uk/springgardening).



PHOTOGRAPHS: JONATHAN GREGSON (MODULAR DESIGN)