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GIFT OF A GARDEN

A garden re-design online consultation might not fit easily into your festive stocking but it could be the ideal Christmas gift for a green-fingered friend or relation

WORDS BY LAURA HICKIE

Is a new garden the perfect gift for someone you know? If you're stuck for gift ideas this Christmas, we have the answer. A new garden. Ok, so maybe not the whole garden, because that would be very difficult to wrap. But, if you know someone who has been lusting after a garden redesign, we've got the perfect gift idea - an online garden consultation voucher. It's the first step towards realising the garden of your dreams.

And the timing couldn't be better
Now is the perfect time to make plans for your garden. When it's quiet and unused and the foliage has mostly died back the garden becomes a blank slate.

It's the ideal time to look at the space you've got and think about what you want from your outdoor area. How have you used it this summer? Is it an inviting and relaxing

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place to be? Is it somewhere you want to hang out with family and show off to friends? These are a few of the questions you should ask yourself, and an Earth Designs Design Online Consultation will help you consider these questions and more.

Like how you'd like to use your garden, its good points and bad, plus practical issues like where the sun falls at dawn and dusk and where plants will flourish. With a little expert help, your garden could be all the things you

hope for and more. So why not seize the moment and start making plans for your new garden? Or give someone else the chance to have that first, essential conversation with a professional garden designer. But of all the things you could spend money on this Christmas, why the garden?

Your garden is a valuable asset
Professional garden design and landscaping comes with a reasonable but considerable price tag, so redesigning the garden is a big decision.

What most people don't realise, is just how much value a new garden adds to your home.

A report by the Post Office last year suggested landscaping your garden could add up to a staggering 77% to your home's overall value. That's more than an extra bedroom or a new kitchen and at a much lower cost.

Gardens can also be playful, pretty and practical, depending on your lifestyle

So while the initial outlay might seem high, a new garden is always worthwhile and a value-for-money investment. But the real value of a garden is about more than just money.

Gardens enrich your life

A properly designed garden is proven to benefit your physical health and mental well-being. They're wonderful social spaces and quiet retreats.

They are places for families to cook, eat and spend time together - or escape from one another! Somewhere to entertain or to find respite from busy lives and noisy cities.

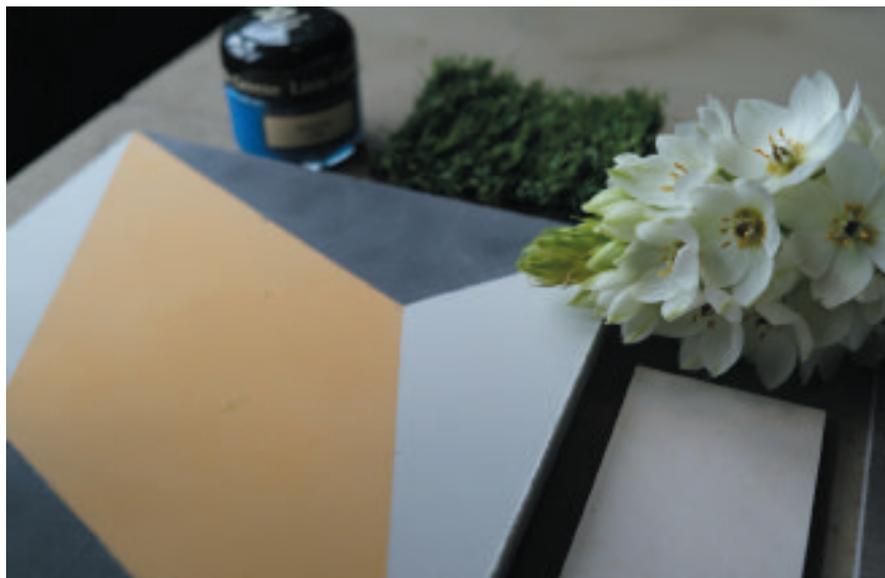
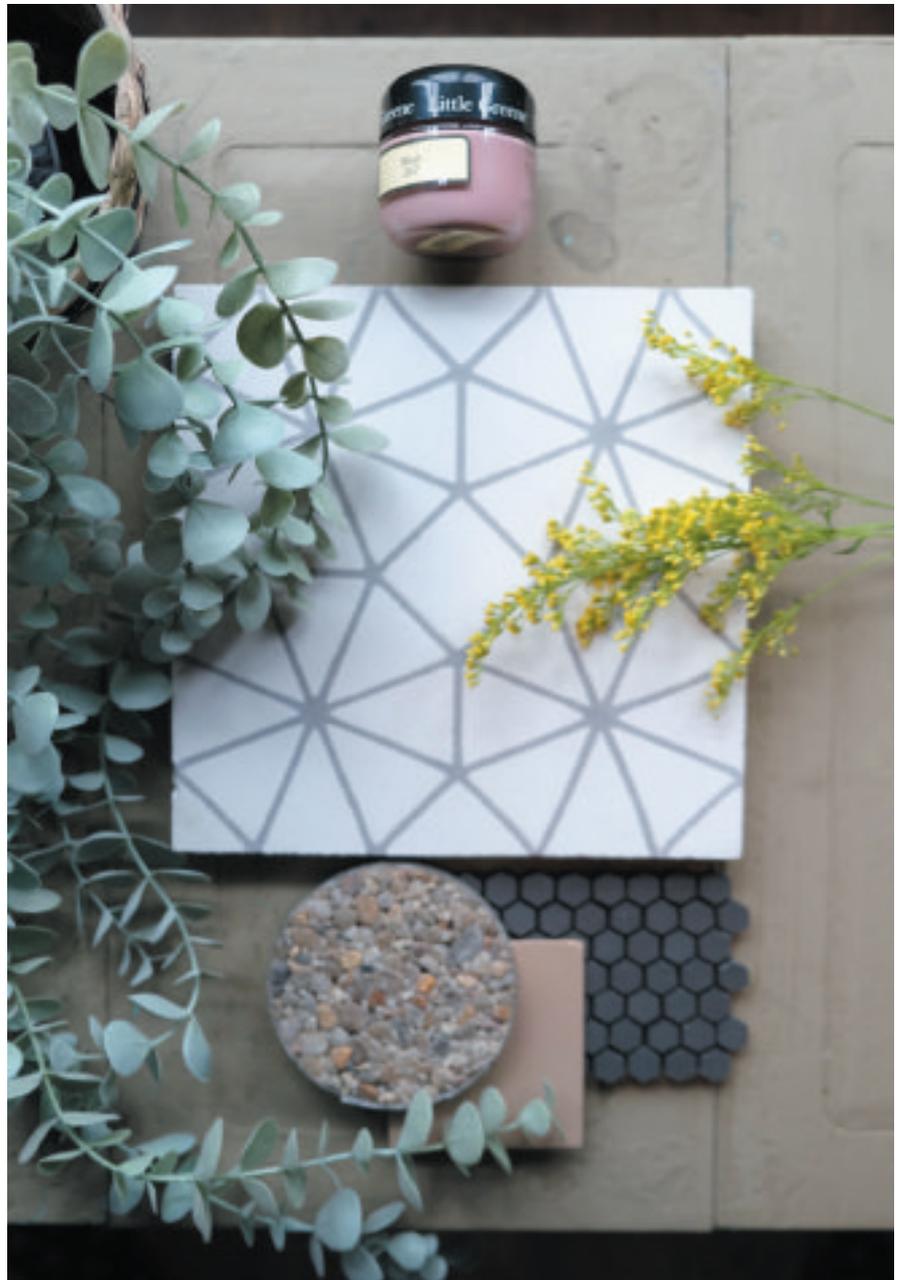
Gardens can also be playful, pretty and practical, depending on your lifestyle. And they don't have to be hard work, unless you enjoy growing and harvesting. The point is, a garden is a flexible, personal space that can be designed to suit your taste, style and needs. But designing the perfect space needs expert input. And that's where a Design Consultation from Earth Designs can make all the difference.

How it works

Because a new garden is a big commitment, Earth Designs breaks their service into stages. The client decides how far to take the process and there is no obligation to move from one stage to the next.

The first stage of every Earth Designs project is a Design Consultation. This consists of an exclusive two-hour chat with lead garden designer Katrina Kieffer-Wells.

Looking at the layout and talking through ideas, thoughts, problems and desires for your garden, Kat explains pros and cons and offers



expert advice based on space and budget, using her experience to suggest features and design solutions that make the most of these

Next Kat creates a bespoke 'concept sketch' for your new garden, with ideas for style, materials and layout. This is yours to keep, along with any notes from the meeting.

An online consultation voucher would 'gift' this experience to a special someone in your life. The lucky recipient will get a two-hour consultation with Kat via Zoom, which means they can be anywhere in the UK. They'll come away bursting with ideas and inspiration, based on expert advice. They'll also have their very own garden 'concept sketch' to keep.

So, once you've had a consultation, what's next? Well, if a client decides to move beyond the consultation phase, the next stage would be to sign-up to a Design Package. Here's how that works. ➔

The most magical thing about a garden is that it just keeps getting better with time

Designing your dream garden

After the consultation, if a client decides they want to take the next step they would sign-up to an Earth Designs design package. This is broken down into two phases:

Phase One

Includes a full site survey, but mostly it's all about the creative process. Kat uses many influences in her designs, from fashion to architecture and furniture design, taking inspiration from shapes, colours, design details and materials.

Combining creative influences with the client's wishes, Kat creates mood boards for a design and materials, plus an outline plan for the new garden. The client also receives a build estimate at this stage, so they can decide if the design is within budget. And there is a chance to make any tweaks and changes, before moving on to Phase Two.

Phase Two

This phase is all about the details. Plans and scale drawings are produced for everything from electrics to planting schedules. Earth Designs also creates 3D drawings and a walk-through of the design, giving the client a chance to take a stroll through their new garden before a spade even touches the ground. Now they will have a complete picture of what their new garden will look like before work begins.

Building your dream garden

Once the designs are agreed, Earth Designs can get busy with the final phase - the build!



This is where their skilled build team steps in to start making those design plans a reality. Led by Kat's husband, Matt Kieffer-Wells, the team handles almost everything in-house, only outsourcing elements that need qualified professionals, like electricians and tree surgeons.

A garden is for life, not just for Christmas

The most magical thing about a garden is that it just keeps getting better with time, which is why the Earth Designs team loves returning to gardens they've created. When a new garden is completed the initial transformation is always impressive. But give it a few months, or a year, and it becomes spectacular. And all growing from that initial two hour design consultation. It's a gift that will bring joy year after year. Vouchers are sent by email. Order by December 21 to avoid disappointment.

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GARDEN GROW-HOW

Leigh-on-Sea-based **Katrina Kieffer-Wells, MSGD**, of Earth Designs on how to banish the winter blues with a garden that refuses to hibernate

The words 'winter garden' conjure up snow-covered lawns and robins. But in reality our gardens are often bare flower beds and wet, brown leaves in winter.

While gardens aren't considered at their best this time of year, clever design details can bring warmth and colour even on the dullest days, creating a picture perfect winter garden that channels sunshine and cheer.

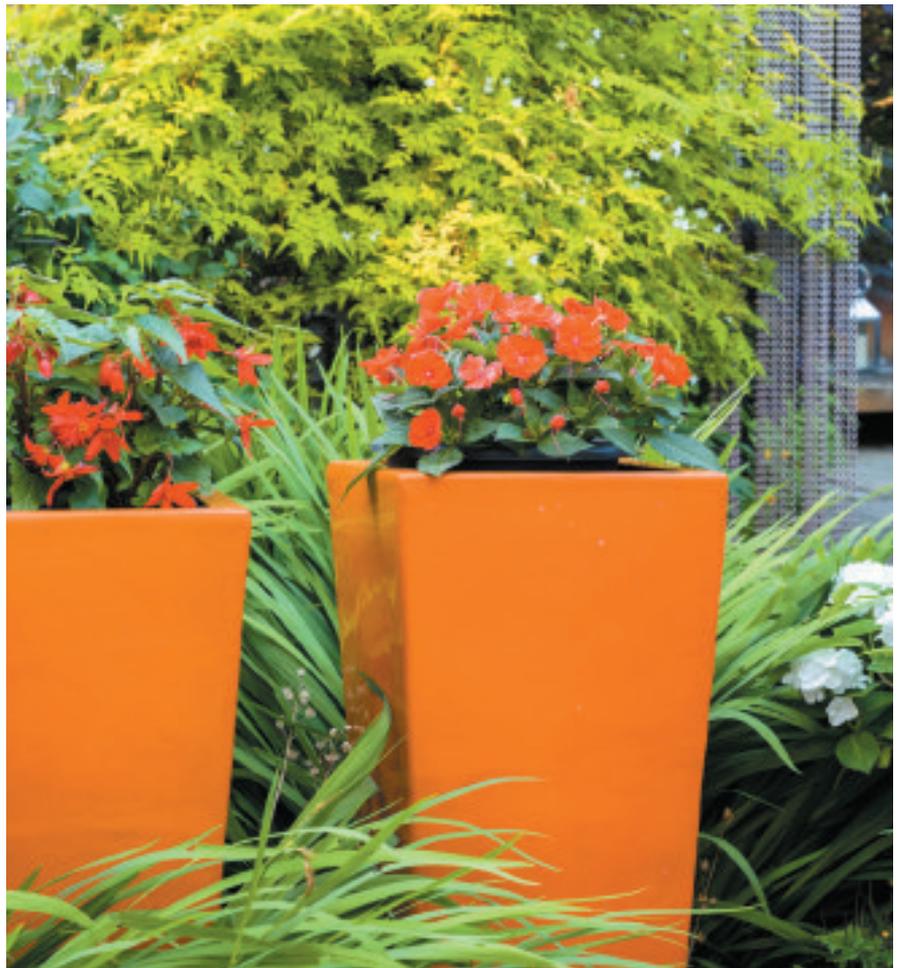
Finishes that flourish in winter

Materials are so important in design, both natural and man-made. When designing I consider not only the colours and textures of plants, but also the materials used in flooring, furniture and fencing. Flowers and foliage die back in winter, but wood, metal and stone look fab all year and can even change and improve in bad weather. The gorgeous warm, rusty finish of corten steel, for instance, weathered over time.

Contrasting dark and light, rough and smooth also remains interesting whatever the season. Pale, porcelain paving lifts a space and reflects light, even when wet. This contrasts beautifully beside gravel or natural pebbles, the depth of their colours deepening in rain.

Details that turn up the heat

Using bold patterns and colours in a garden can make a dramatic backdrop for planting or a focal point to draw the eye. Tiles and paint make a big splash that stays bright and



cheerful all year. I even use coloured perspex cladding on fences or boundaries to bring extra colour to a space. While giant, colourful planters also brighten the vista.

Plants that pack a punch

Evergreen trees and shrubs are the green in your garden all year round - and not just green either. Some have vibrant leaves, berries or even flowers in autumn and winter. They often take a back row seat in summer when the flouncy flowers are out, but become the stars around now. Place evergreens in strategic places. Bamboo, yuccas and choisya, look modern, adventurous and fresh.

Award-winning Earth Designs are members of the British Association of Landscape Industries and the Association of Professional Landscapers.

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