

A garden room of one's own

By Blair Farris

Garden rooms, large or small, are a way to give outdoor spaces a unique personality. Garden designers have long known that designing more intimate spaces or garden rooms make the yard seem bigger and more full of wonder, mystery and discovery. And if you can't see the entire space from your home, it can become even more magical, enticing the curious to venture out to explore the garden.



Garden rooms can be created in many ways, including defining it with walls, hedges, plant material and hardscapes. But first, think about how you will use the area. Is it dining, entertaining, contemplation, intimate relaxation or do you really need a place for your kids to kick the soccer ball?

You don't want your garden room to be too big. So when you consider creating a dining or entertaining space, make sure that it suits your needs and that it can accommodate your outdoor furniture. Measure your furniture and add about 36 inches around the seating area so it is easy to access and move around. Arrange vignettes so that guests can sit near each other for more intimate conversations.

It is wonderful to have a nice brick or blue stone terrace underfoot but there are other less expensive materials that can be used in elegant ways. Try a beautiful, Alabama brown pea gravel or scored concrete. If there is a need for more seating, a low seat wall serves two-fold, offering extra seating and enclosure.

Also consider structure when you are

creating a garden room — there are many ways to accomplish that. For example: a group of eight, tall, hornbeam trees could be used to enclose your seating area or a pergola placed at the back of the yard could draw your eye through the garden. Make sure that the structure is proportional to your house. You don't want something that is too big and overpowering or too small and wimpy.

I recently gave a small garden space a complete overhaul and I applauded the owners for wanting an entry that is more private. They live very close to Carmel Road. We designed a formal, bluestone courtyard garden and used a fountain as the focal point. Boxwoods and climbing roses anchored an existing, massive brick wall and four Crepe Myrtles in the corners. The courtyard is hidden from the public by an arborvitae hedge. When guests arrive, they enter between the hedges, giving them a sense of crossing from public space into private. And they don't see the fountain until they have completely arrived, giving them a gift of the unexpected.

One of my favorite projects is on a small lot in Dilworth. We divided the backyard into four distinct areas: children's play area, lawn panel, dining space and lounging and grilling location. By separating the areas with boxwood hedges, you move from one area to another to create a sense of a larger space. The dining and sitting area with a firepit is enclosed by columnar trees to give it height and privacy, creating a "room" with tall walls. A large willow oak in the neighbor's yard provides shade and an extremely high "ceiling."

Wing Haven is a perfect example of an exquisite garden designed using different rooms. It is one of Charlotte's jewels. Elizabeth Clarkson planted the first seeds in the garden in 1927 and it has become "a



pocket of paradise open to all," as written in the Wing Haven Guide. It is impossible to see everything at once. You must roam from garden room to garden room, each one enticing you into the next. With different plant material, hedges, shade, sun, fountains, reflecting pools and focal points, the Clarksons created a sense of place for birds, animals and people alike. I won't go on too much because I will be writing an entire column on Wing Haven in the spring, but I will tell you that it is not a garden to be missed. ■

For more than 16 years, Blair Farris, a Charlotte-based landscape designer, has used her education and talents to create beautiful and interesting spaces for commercial and residential properties. Visit her website at www.blairfarrisdesigns.com.

For the reader

A Small Garden Designer's Handbook by Roy Strong. Don't let the name fool you. You don't have to have a small garden to love this book. It gives you great ideas about structure for a garden.

An extraordinary garden experience

Wing Haven
248 Ridgewood Ave.
Charlotte NC 28209
704.331.0664

www.winghavengardens.com

The gardens, enclosed on all sides by brick walls, encompass almost three acres in the heart of Charlotte. They offer visitors lovely vistas, formal gardens and woodland areas.

Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden at Wing Haven
348 Ridgewood Ave.
Charlotte NC 28209

Tip of the Month

Gather all of the falling leaves and start a compost pile. Turn it every few days and let the leaves break down. You can add manure or other organic matter to speed up the decomposition. In the spring, sprinkle this in garden beds. The plants will love the natural compost. And don't forget to plant your bulbs!



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