

*Expert tip*

Strong, well-defined shapes are at the heart of any good garden design. Get the key element shapes right – the lawn, garden beds, paths and structures – then consider the plants.

# Shaping up

*Get the shapes right and you're well on your way to having a well-balanced backyard*

**WORDS:** Amanda Elboz, MAILDM

One of the first steps when designing a garden is to decide on the shapes that will be used throughout the new design. These shapes will then help to determine what style direction the garden will take. Straight, angular lines give a space a more formal look whereas curved, organic shapes create a more relaxed feel.

Selecting the right shapes is a crucial element in the design process, but it's not always as simple as it might seem as there are many contributing factors to be considered. Because of this complexity, working with a professional landscape designer is recommended.

## *Lay of the land*

The initial dictating factor when deciding which shapes to introduce into your garden is the topography of the land. It is relatively easy to create any desired garden shape on a flat piece of land, whereas a garden with many levels and slopes can be more problematic and present more restrictions.

With flatter, larger areas of land, shapes may be chosen to reflect the architectural style of the residence or some existing features, such as a swimming pool or deck, can be incorporated into the design. With a sloping garden, creating a functional, easy-to-use space is the main objective and



**pre-pres  
please deep  
etch**

**LEFT** In this garden, designed by Space Landscape Designs, the circular seating area provides a relaxed ambience.

**TOP** You can use furniture, such as the rectangular Hollow benches from Lebello, to repeat key shapes.

the shapes employed will be dictated by the contours of the land.

## *Matter of style*

Symmetrical straight lines, such as squares and rectangles, can balance a garden and direct the eye to a view or focal point. Straight lines can also be used to square off a garden that has irregularly shaped boundaries. An important point to remember is that symmetrical lines needn't appear harsh or overly formal – they can be easily softened by your choice of plants. A current trend is to use a structured layout with formal lines balanced with looser planting styles; for example, strappy-leaved plants bordering a straight path or trailing plants cascading over a clean-edged retaining wall.

Curved lines can soften an angular space and suggest movement. They can be used to integrate existing elements in a garden, such as a mature tree that you want to include in the new garden design but it's in a position where a straight line – be it for a deck or garden bed – wouldn't work. By no means do curved shapes equate to casual outdoor areas – a series of circles used in a garden design can create a very balanced look, especially when teamed with a more formal and structured style of planting.

## *Repetition of shapes*

You can repeat shapes such as triangles, circles and squares throughout a garden design to increase impact. These shapes might find form in a path, garden bed, deck or in an element of décor, such as a wall plaque, outdoor mirror or furniture. A combination of shapes can be used, too – if done well, a mix of angular and curved lines can add interest. However, take care when working with a limited space to ensure elements don't clash.

When it comes to small spaces, don't assume curves will take up too much space. Gently curving forms can make a small garden seem a little bigger as the shapes engage the eye rather than allowing your sight to rush right across the garden as can be the case with straight lines. ■  
*Amanda Elboz of Space Landscape Designs is a Sydney-based landscape designer.*