

# Keeping curb appeal

It's often the case that front gardens tend to be paved over and used as a car park. **Nina Baxter** explores some options to marry the practicalities of modern life and aesthetics.

The traditional image of the front garden – in the UK at least – is a well-tended patch of grass, a couple of small borders and perhaps a few pots to add some colour, a prettily paved path, and a crisply edged front hedge. Many people aspire to this but the realities of modern life in our increasingly developed green and pleasant land with narrow suburban roads, smaller frontages and the increased difficulty of actually parking your car in front of your own house. This has meant the number of front gardens that have been paved over has increased dramatically to a quarter of all dwellings in the UK over the last 10 years.

There's a clear environmental cost with all this paving being laid. With the weather now increasingly unpredictable and yearly flooding becoming a sad fact of life for many homeowners, it is more important than ever to consider other options for this important bit of real estate. The best place to start is with a professionally created design. If anything, having a garden design plan is more important for a small space than for a large one as every centimetre is important. Considered planning in collaboration with a good garden designer will create a characterful space that has real impact with carefully chosen planting, yet still allows for areas of utility – space for the car or a bike shed, and room for those ugly recycling bins!

## **Eight ideas to enhance and keep your curb appeal:**

**1** Make a statement with big pots or box balls. Your front door will look much grander if flanked by topiary or some architectural planting in colourful pots – it's something that enhances the entrance and welcomes you towards the door. With small spaces, it's best to 'go big'; otherwise the space can look fussy, so the larger the feature, the better.

**2** Avoid planting large or invasive shrubs. The use of airy and structural plants that you can see through and which give privacy whilst letting light in can make a massive effect on the amount of light that reaches your front windows. Try tall, evergreen grasses and *Verbena bonariensis*.

**3** A lawn is no longer essential in a front garden. Areas of grass require maintenance and an unkempt patch can make the whole house look unloved and uncared for. Use the space saved for creative planting instead.



Photo: Matthew Baxter

**4** A pathway will become much more defined and will lead the eye to the front of the house if edged with something simple and low maintenance with a long flowering period, such as *Nepeta 'Walker's Low'* or *Lavendula 'Richard Gray'*. Box hedging can also be used but will require more patience as it's much more slow-growing!

**5** Your car does not need an expensive bit of paving to sit on. One of the best alternatives to traditional hard-standing is a product called NidaGravel. A polypropylene honeycombed sheet that sits on a layer of permeable sub-base, it becomes invisible once filled with gravel or chippings. The gravel will stay put and water can flow straight through, meaning no annoying puddles to avoid when you step out of the car.

**6** With the increased environmental need to recycle, the black and green crates are now a familiar sight across the UK. Construction of a simple timber structure similar in look to a composter is one solution but even a simple panel of trellis with a fragrant *Lonicera japonica 'Halliana'* growing across it will hide those unsightly boxes away.



**7** Good lighting will always enhance a front garden and with the increased quality of solar lights available online, it doesn't have to prove expensive in installation or running costs. The Philips myGarden range and the Albany solar spotlights manufactured by Cree offer attractive, fully weather-proofed products that give real illumination, rather than a soft glow, with nothing more to pay.

**8** Trees provide a haven for birds, bees and insects. Planting a variety of smaller tree like Magnolia 'Leonard Messel' or the crab, Malus sylvestris will add height and movement to the space, and with occasional maintenance will never become too dominant.

The paving over of Britain's front gardens has led to a huge loss of aesthetics in our streetscapes, and is affecting the habitat of many of our native fauna. Give yourself a frontage to be proud of and stand out from the rest of the crowd by considering some new ideas for your front garden. After all, it is the first thing you and your visitors see and a bit of careful planning and a little TLC will go a long way. ✨

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