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ALL GARDENS great & small

Whether you're blessed with a rambling acreage, quaint Victorian courtyard or something in between, creating a garden that complements your period home is well worth the effort

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From changing a light globe in a house with ten-foot ceilings, to attempting to match existing ceiling roses and fretwork, or learning to live with a hundred years worth of scratches on a timber floor, any homeowner will tell you that period homes require an extra-special level of love and care. The same can be said of the garden. Sure, you could pop any old plants in, but in order to really show off your heritage home, it's worth considering a complementary garden that will allow the period architecture to really shine.

"I've found that most custodians of period homes have a genuine passion for characterful architecture – homes that have both a history and a soul – and want to ensure the garden pays homage to the property's heritage in order to do it true justice," says Jaye Metcalfe, a landscape designer who specialises in creating gardens for period homes.

"As with any well-designed garden, it needs to take its cues from the architectural style and lines. It's like a well-chosen frame to a beautiful painting – a garden needs to have a strong sense of belonging to successfully complement and enhance the property."

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER

While some period properties have the luxury of a large, rambling garden, even the smallest gardens can take their cues from the architectural style of the home.

Traditionally, Victorian and Edwardian courtyard gardens were geometric in style. "The traditional layout evolved from the grid-form pattern of early gardens," says Jaye. "The front garden typically had a straight central path leading from the front gate to the front door, lined on each side by rectangular garden beds or in the case of smaller terrace gardens, a path offset to one side. "If you're recreating an authentic period-style courtyard garden I'd recommend keeping it simple – less is definitely more in small spaces."

A unified border planting of a traditional species such as English box, rosemary or lavender creates a strong backbone structure – Jaye favours Dutch Box due to its compact nature. The garden beds can then be mass planted with a diversity of old-world yet hardy plants including roses, rhododendrons, hydrangeas, gardenias, succulents and agapanthus, along with seasonal annuals and bulbs.

Climbing plants such as wisteria, jasmine, clematis, ivy and climbing roses were also very popular. These may be supported by arbors, climb up the verandah posts to soften the architecture or effectively cover the boundary fences.

CLASSICAL PLANTINGS, CONTEMPORARY STYLE

Traditional period gardens were often an opportunity for homeowners to cram in as many varieties of exotic and ornamental plants as possible. They often employed gardeners to maintain their collections, rather than get their own hands dirty. Lawns didn't become commonplace until after World War I, and most homes featured a decorative front yard and a purely utilitarian backyard. These days, many heritage homeowners favour low maintenance, waterwise spaces, rather than the fussy, labour-intensive gardens of past centuries.

The recommended planting palette for gardens has also undergone significant changes over the last century. "With the faster paced lifestyle of today, paired with the more extreme climatic conditions, the planting palette of landscape designers has had to undergo a

rather radical evolution in the past decade or more," says Jaye. "With the ever-present possibility of drought and heavy frosts, we've had to demand more of the plants we use in our gardens – they have to earn their place from both a practical and aesthetic perspective."

Landscape design mirrors contemporary architects in demanding more from the spaces and aesthetics of our homes and gardens. Many heritage homes have undergone renovations that create multi-use spaces and favour open-plan living and flexibility, which is being echoed in the garden.

"Now more than ever there is a blending of the old and the new, creating literally the best of both worlds," said Jaye. "This minimalistic balance is being carried into the more contemporary outdoor spaces of heritage homes."

WHAT PLANTS WORK WHERE?

Popular plantings to complement a period home without the fussiness include drought-tolerant hedging species such as Hill's weeping fig, bay tree, magnolia grandiflora varieties and a multitude of ornamental pear species.

Native Australian plants offer a hardy, low maintenance alternative to introduced species. The 'Green Screen' lilli pilli and weeping lilli pilli amongst other lilli pilli and acacia varieties are gaining momentum. Feature trees include old favourites like crepe myrtle and jacaranda, along with native newcomers like Kanooka gum.

In regards to the border planting, nothing can beat the Buxus species (English or Dutch) in creating a sense of history. Jaye also recommends incorporating it in topiary form either as an informal grouping of domes, or as accent points within the hedge for some added detail.

For a more relaxed border planting, lilyturf offers climatic versatility. Species such as clivia, New Zealand rock lily, Perez's sea lavender, other lavender species, gardenia, and iris along with succulents such as agave and a mixture of echeveria species have all earned their place in today's period style gardens. Traditional rose species and the select heirloom plant varieties are also favoured. The climber palette is still in great demand too, with confederate jasmine, Boston ivy, creeping fig, wisteria, grape vine and rose species being popular choices.

FROM LEFT: Bluestone paving contrasts against the dark green foliage of the magnolias and box hedges; a Dutch box hedge and established agaves welcome visitors to this Federation home.



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A low Dutch Box hedge borders a garden bed filled with bearded iris, azaleas and lilies; the side garden includes dwarf agapanthus and pleached fig trees to provide privacy; a custom bluestone water feature includes quirky taps that the owner purchased overseas; an avenue of white birch trees line the driveway, their white trunks complementing the red bricks of this classic Victorian home.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: Artificial turf is low maintenance and waterwise, and today's high end products look just like the real thing; a fire pit in the front courtyard is an extension of the living room, perfect for year-round entertaining



“A garden is like a well-chosen frame to a beautiful painting – it needs to have a strong sense of belonging to complement and enhance the property.”

FEDERATION BY THE BAY

Trudy and Matt Cook live in a 1904 Federation home in Elsternwick, in bayside Melbourne. The home has recently been renovated, adding an open plan kitchen and living space, office area, and a retreat for their two teenagers.

The garden was designed to be easy to maintain and to complement the heritage architecture of the home. “We love that the garden is so low maintenance but looks great all year round,” says Trudy.

Tall magnolias and ornamental pears along the side boundaries provide privacy and a sense of enclosure, while traditional low box hedges, flowering shrubs and bulbs replicate the formality and structure of Federation gardens. In the centre of the yard is a formal water feature surrounded by bluestone paving, providing a focal point.

Plants with modern architectural foliage such as agave and sedum contrast with the florals, adding structure and interest.

“There are about 20 plant varieties in use in the garden,” says Jaye. “Traditionally, heritage gardens of this era had no lawns, and the owners would cram in as many species as possible. Replicating such a busy, high maintenance garden is not practical for many owners of

period homes today, who want a garden which is sympathetic to the style of the home, but with modern, low-maintenance plantings.”

Using evergreen plantings such as magnolia, camellia, buxus, gardenias and iris means the garden looks great year-round.

AN EDWARDIAN FIT FOR A FAMILY

Rowena Scott and her family have recently moved back into their home in Brighton after renting it out for several years. The weatherboard home has undergone an extensive renovation, adding a pool, open plan living area and a second storey. Every inch of the compact block has been put to use, incorporating an entertainment space in the front yard complete with a fire pit, and an outdoor kitchen and living area at the rear.

Existing magnolia trees and a lilli pilli hedge provide privacy, while Jaye added a pleached fig hedge, bay trees and a series of Dutch box domes to create interest and structure. Rowena and Jaye also selected artificial turf for the front and back yard, as opposed to instant turf, to reduce maintenance and water consumption. “The use of artificial turf

is gaining momentum here in Australia and it certainly has its advantages,” Jaye says. “It’s reassuring that there are some great high-end artificial turf products now available on the market.”

MOONEE PONDS VICTORIAN

Di Djokovic and her family undertook a garden overhaul in 2012, to complement their ornate Victorian home. An existing avenue of white birch trees bordering the driveway was retained, as well as several other established deciduous trees.

A structured bluestone path in the front yard leads to the verandah, which is decorated with standard cumquats, while a Dutch box hedge creates a formal border, planted out with iris, agapanthus, lilies and Japanese windflowers.

Pleached fig trees line the side walkway, providing privacy and greenery. They are underplanted with dwarf white agapanthus, which have a narrow, strappier leaf than common agapanthus varieties. Finally, a custom-built water feature in the front yard uses tap spouts that Di purchased overseas, providing a focal point for the expansive garden. PHIR

Jaye Metcalf is principal designer at Jaye Metcalf Designer Gardens in Melbourne. For more information, visit jayemetcalfdesignergardens.com.au