

# Structure in the Garden

WITH SUMMER NOW UNDER WAY, IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR PEOPLE TO LOOK OUT INTO THEIR GARDENS AND FEEL A BIT LET DOWN BY THEIR EFFORTS. ONCE THE BEDDING PLANTS HAVE PEAKED OFTEN THE GARDEN CAN TAKE ON A SLIGHTLY NEGLECTED LOOK. TO AVOID THIS EFFECT IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENSURE THAT THE GARDEN CONTAINS STRUCTURE.

Where you are planning a new garden providing structure is relatively easy using a mixture of different or feature ground surfaces, partitioning & perennial plants. Where you are adding structure to an established garden this can be more difficult, but the addition of structural plants is the simplest way to do this.

I'm sure a lot of people will be saying what do I mean by structure. What I do not mean necessarily, is the use of buildings and paving everywhere. In it's simplest form it is the use of different materials within the garden, both hard and soft which will provide interest all year round. This can give you different forms, textures and colours, but also don't forget scent. The skill is in using enough for interest but not over doing it which will result in sensory overload. Structure can also be used as a framework for showing off other features of the garden that would otherwise be lost in the sea of foliage, flower or stone.

When planning a garden paving is often one of the first choices that is made. You need enough paving to enable the garden to be accessible all year round. If you want to spend a lot of time sitting and enjoying

the garden choosing paving that will add to the interest would in most cases be important. In a few cases a more utilitarian approach could be appropriate.

The main frameworks almost certainly would involve providing a backdrop for the garden. This could be in the form of a wall or fence, but in most cases I would recommend a simple green backdrop of plants, even if you do need a wall or fence for security purposes. Using a dense green canopy such as laurel yew or other conifers is like providing a plain backdrop when you are painting a portrait. Like with this you do not want to detract from the main subject whether this comes in the form of a pot, sculpture, plant or flower border. In smaller gardens it may be necessary to ensure that this backdrop has a bit of seasonal interest such as the spring red leaves of photinia turning green for the rest of the year.

For larger gardens and borders it is advisable to break up the landscape with the use of more greenery as partitions. In some gardens this could take the form of formality by the use of trimmed buxus (box) plants as mini hedges, or in borders it may be the use of a few plants which are reliable in performance, which

may not be outstanding on their own, eg tiarella (a foliage plant) but provide the partition or backdrop to more seasonal plants such as many other cottage garden plants and some shrubs.

The use of partitions are also great to show off specimen plants: cloud trees or simpler topiary as well as many other specimen plants are shown to their best with a plain backdrop, this could be the stone of the house or patio or a contrasting plant form. What I will guarantee is that it will make you stop and think on that next lazy day!

This hopefully has given you a bit to think about the next time you are sat dreaming in the garden. The only other bit of advice is that the best thinking is always done with a drink in your hand, choose your tippie.

*For more information or help with your planting contact The Big Plant Centre at Pantiles, Almnors Road, Lyne, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0BJ or call 01932 872195 or visit the website at [www.bigplantcentre.co.uk](http://www.bigplantcentre.co.uk).*

