



1 THE SHED HAS an on-trend cedar shingle roof and is painted matt black.

2 WITH THE FOCUS on entertaining, the patio had to be large enough for a Big Green Egg barbecue, table and at least six chairs.

3 BRICKS MATCHING the house were used on a retaining wall to link the garden and home, while the drain is disguised with stylish covers.

Reader
MAKEOVER

“My garden puts me in a good mood”

YASMIN AMIR-ANSARAI AND JOHN BARTON turned their unloved garden into a smart green space to enjoy all year round

WORDS: JANE CRITCHFIELD PHOTOS: LOUISE BELL IN THE GARDEN CO. UK

READER GARDEN

BEFORE



The shady patio had to go. It was time for a sunny entertaining space and lush planting.

OUR GARDEN PLAN

LOCATION

“Our late Victorian home is in Dulwich, south London. We wanted year-round planting interest we could enjoy looking at from inside the house too, a comfortable seating area, and a place for our barbecue.”

THE LOOK

French formality created with evergreens and elegant white planting

SITE & SOIL

Size 9.5m x 7m (31ft x 23ft)
Faces West Soil London clay

OUR BUDGET

Groundwork preparation and rubbish removal £3,026
New fence and trellis panels £2,373
Cathedral Yorkstone paving £5,000
Building retaining wall and laying paving £6,658
Lighting £1,204
Plants £4,680
Aquascape drain in Carbon Chon (from Lateral Design Studio) £1,000
TOTAL £23,941

HOW LONG IT TOOK

Groundworks 80 hours
Paving 80 hours
Planting 32 hours
TOTAL 192 HOURS

AFTER



THE DINING area has perfumed plants nearby, such as winter box.

Scented winter box



WHITE ROSES HUG
fences and climb about
green foliage from May to
the end of the year.



THE BIG GREEN EGG
barbecue is a key part of
the entertaining space.



ROSES, PEONIES
and viburnum create a calm
green and white palette.

When Yasmin Amir-Ansari and John Barron bought their south London Victorian terrace in 2007, they liked the garden so much they simply planted some shrubs and flowers, and removed two large trees which blocked the light into the kitchen. Then in 2013, they got a Bernese Mountain Dog puppy. Quite quickly, the garden descended into a muddy mess.

"We hadn't done a lot of gardening over the years and then when Juno arrived, she dug holes everywhere and there was barely any grass left," Yasmin explains.

Yasmin and John knew things had come to a head. "We had a patio near the house, but it never really got the sun, and yet the massive shed took up nearly a quarter of the garden and was in the sunniest spot."

Although they desperately wanted to improve their outdoor space, the couple decided to concentrate on a new kitchen first. However, when their builder pointed out that with no side access, it made sense to get all the dirty work done before having the new kitchen installed, suddenly it was full steam ahead outdoors!

"We knew we didn't want a lawn," says Yasmin, "not so much because of Juno's digging but because we wanted to entertain outside and needed a paved area large enough for a Big Green Egg barbecue, a good-sized table and six chairs."

"Planting wise, we wanted to use evergreens in a simple structural way that we could enjoy looking out at all year round."

Not sure how to move things forwards, the couple employed landscape designer Louisa Bell from the Lovely Garden.

They set-up a shared Pinterest board, something Louisa often does with her clients. "I encourage them to choose pictures of things

they love – be it a cushion, a painting or a plant. This helps me gain an insight into who they are and how they like to live," she explains. "Yasmin chose pictures of lovely French-style gardens with grey architectural framed doors, and views through the glass. I could see she was drawn towards structural planting with lots of evergreen texture too."

ENTERTAINING SPACE

Yasmin placed the main eating area further back in the sunniest part of the garden, complemented by a patio near the dining room doors to catch the last of the sun at the end of the day.

Without a lawn, the paving needed careful consideration. "I love the colour of Yorkstone and that the slabs are large and not uniform in size," says Yasmin. "They were expensive, and I did look at other, cheaper options, but I decided they would be a long-term investment and I'd always regret it if I didn't use them."

London Yellow Stock bricks, to match the house, have been used to build the retaining wall where the garden changes level. A survey

highlighted a waterlogged area that would need drainage along the edge of the new patio. Louisa recommended a range of stylish drain covers, supplied by Lateral Design Studio.

"I had no idea drain covers could look so good," says Yasmin. "We can see the drains from our house so it's much nicer to look out and see something stylish. Louisa also suggested we fit cedar shingles on the new shed roof, paint the outside and plant around. That's made a huge difference to look out on too."

WHITE ROSES

David's crew began the groundworks in May 2015, removing the rubbish, building the retaining wall, and laying the slabs. A couple of months later the planting began.

"I wanted lots of evergreens with different textures and leaf shapes. Louisa convinced me to have white roses, and now I'm really pleased she did because they look so pretty when they're in bloom," says Yasmin.

Thirty shrub roses were planted, along with six climbing roses, which fan against the fences. All are white – as are nearly all the flowers in the garden – enhancing the green hues in the leafy planting. The roses add a structural element to the garden as they bloom from May to the end of the year.

Structure also comes from the evergreens, with formal topiary box hedges and clipped box balls chosen to reflect Yasmin's love of French gardens. Scented winter box, daphne,



CHOOSE YOUR SPOT

With the old shed gone, the patio and eating area are in the sunniest spot.



Viburnum davidii and evergreen ferns add to the scheme, providing the link between the autumn and spring flowers for a continuity of planting all year.

Tall Amelanchier trees screen the barbecue and shed, with white blossom in spring and vivid autumn colour – along with white anemones and white penstemons. As winter approaches, the evergreens carry on filling the garden with their textured green leaves. Then spring brings white tulips, the unfurling leaves of peonies and scented daphne blooms, followed by white hydrangea 'Annabelle' and the 'Iceberg' roses.

Louisa's planting pays attention to the sunny and shaded beds too. Penstemons and roses thrive in the sun, while anemones and ferns prefer shade and grow under the trees. The

hydrangeas bloom, big and blowsy, near the dining room doors. Daphne has been planted in pots here, too, to scent the steps near the house and close to where the family sit outside.

"I've mixed in a variety of seasonal plants because I wanted the whole garden to bloom throughout the year," Louisa explains. "Even on the darkest of winter days, the white Christmas roses look beautiful." Yasmin's favourite spot is the raised bed, perfectly placed in view of the dining room doors.

"I would never have thought to build a raised bed here but the planting looks so lush," she says. "Before, I would sit at the dining table eating breakfast with my back to the garden. Now I love looking out. My garden puts me in a good mood every morning!"

READER GARDEN

Evergreens for fantastic foliage



FORTUNE'S SPINDLE 'HARLEQUIN'

The leaves of this easy to grow dwarf shrub start life pure white before being splashed with gorgeous light and dark green speckles.
Height 50cm (20in.) Spread 70cm (28in.)
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SHRUBBY VERONICA

Grey-green leaves are the perfect foil for feathery-soft clusters of tiny white flowers in June. Height 90cm (36in.) Spread 60cm (24in.)
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FATSIA JAPONICA

In Japan – where this bold, glossy-leaved plant comes from – its name means eight, the number of chubby, spreading finger-like lobes of each leaf. Height and Spread 4m (13ft) £14.99 www.crowders.co.uk