

ASK THE designer

Got a problem? We've got the solution!

How can we turn our shady, overlooked, root-filled city garden into a leafy entertaining space?

Irina Phillips, North London

Shady city gardens are often on the small side and overlooked on one or more sides, and they don't obviously lend themselves to becoming leaf-filled spaces fit for relaxing and entertaining. Add in practical issues such as hungry tree roots and poor soil, and you might be left scratching your head for inspiration.

Fortunately, this is where experienced garden designers excel and East London-based Jackie Cahoon (seedoncesown.com) has first-hand experience. "The owners of this garden wanted fresh ideas and a way to make the space somewhere they could enjoy; to relax after work in greenery and host guests," says Jackie. "They had recently renovated their house and now, with year-round views of the garden from the kitchen and dining room, they wanted a design completed quickly so the hard landscaping could be finished."

FLOOR & WALL OVERHAUL

Brightening up the dingy space was a priority. The rear garden wall was in a perilous state and needed to be rebuilt before any work could start, while the other two were repaired. Next, in consultation with neighbours, the neighbouring trees were pruned and trimmed extensively to let light in. To brighten up the dingy space further, Jackie added a pale-toned, easy-to-care-for composite deck to echo the light brickwork. "We chose light-

coloured Millboard decking to help bring more light into the space and we integrated low-key decking and wall lighting for evenings and to light up the garden from the kitchen."

Privacy was always going to be an issue in this overlooked garden, so Jackie came up with a nifty plan to extend the height of the walls. "I designed a smart angled trellis and small storage unit, to match the upmarket house interior, made of environmentally-friendly Kebony timber."

RAISE-THE-BAR PLANTING

One of the key issues with this plot was that very little would grow due to the dense shade and neighbouring mature trees. "The root protection zone of the sycamores just about covered the whole garden, making digging impossible," explains Jackie. "Our solution was to introduce a raised deck at the back, where the most problematic roots were, and create a gentle stepped route to it from the existing stone terrace via two large deck steps. This allowed the main planted area to be infilled with new compost and topsoil and for a raised planter to be built at the back for screening plants." Another benefit was that the main planting was on the sunny side of the garden.

To create drama, height and balance on the plot's shadier side, Jackie chose multi-stemmed *Acer palmatum* 'Pixie' for its rich burgundy spring foliage that gradually turns crimson in autumn.

Planting elsewhere included a large proportion of evergreens, so the view from the kitchen and dining room, seen through the new full height bifold doors, was lush and green all year round. A mix of varying leaf shapes and textures, favourites include shuttlecock-like soft shield fern and slow-growing cushions of *Japanese pittosporum* 'Nanum'.

A tired, blank space, dwarfed by trees and overlooked on all sides

BEFORE



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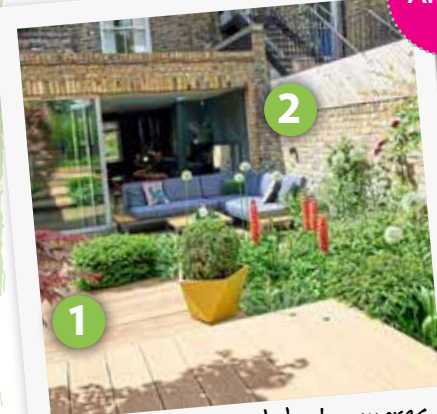
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AFTER



Sleek diagonal panelling conceals storage, and neighbours!



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Get the look

1 DECKING Enhanced Grain Ashwood Millboard, £71/32mm x 176mm x 3.6m, chilterntimber.co.uk

2 LIGHTING Lap Bronx Outdoor Wall Light Black, £9.98 screwfix.com

3 TRELLIS Harrod Decorative Panels, £120/0.35m x 1.7m, harrodhorticultural.com

4 YEW *Taxus baccata* - Cube, £234.95/50cm x 50cm gardenplantsonline.co.uk

5 BAMBOO *Fargesia jiuzhaigou* 'Red Dragon', £25/2-3L burncoose.co.uk

6 ACER PALMATUM 'PIXIE', £34.99/5-7L jacksonsnurseries.co.uk

7 ALLIUM 'WHITE GIANT', £9.99/3 jparkers.co.uk

A series of raised deck squares, yew cubes and lush planting has transformed this root-filled plot

GOT A GARDEN PROBLEM?

Tell us about it, send a picture of your plot and we'll select the best for expert design inspiration! Email us at moderngardens@bauermedia.co.uk

Jackie Cahoon, Garden Designer

"For a year-round green outlook from large rear windows, include plenty of evergreens such as ferns, glossy-leaved shrubs and clipped yew"

