

PART ONE

ELEMENTS
OF DESIGN*Gateways • Doors • Porches • Paths • Thresholds*

Create an entrance that is always a pleasure to pass through – for you and your visitors

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A lovely front garden is a delight to see and whatever gate or doorway you pass through en-route, it should heighten the anticipation of getting home. Pausing to dip under an archway of greenery or brushing past a deliciously fragrant shrub is all part of the appeal and they can easily be incorporated to add both character and charm. It's important to make the way through the garden obvious but this can be signalled in the subtlest of ways – by symmetrical

placing of box balls to mark the path, for instance, or by putting in clear focal points to aim for.

A reasonable proportion of evergreens will ensure all-year-round structure and should cut down on maintenance. A relatively limited colour palette of both plants and paint colours will help keep the overall look harmonious but don't forget the element of surprise as well. Front gardens are potentially sociable places that encourage interaction with neighbours and passers-by, so make the most of that, too.

PLANT A
CLIMBER

Walls offer the ideal planting opportunity, especially where space is limited. A climbing rose is the ultimate cottage-garden favourite, enhancing a pretty property or helping to disguise less-than-attractive architectural features. *Clematis armandii* and wisteria have sweetly scented flowers, while on a sunny wall you could try star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) or the flamboyant trumpet vine *Campsis x tagliabuana* 'Madame Galen'. For autumn colour, consider Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, right), the crimson glory vine (*Vitis coignetiae*) or Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*).



POTTED CHARM

Containers can bring the garden right up to your doorstep, providing colour and interest exactly where you want it. Rustic baskets are great for growing herbs to keep handy by the door and because they are lightweight they can be easily moved or swapped about. Line the baskets with plastic cut from old compost bags and punctured with a few holes to improve drainage. Oregano, mint, rosemary, thyme and sage all thrive in pots.





ADD A SEASONAL TABLE

If you have a veranda or a space by your entranceway that is under the protection of a porch, add interest there with an old piece of painted furniture such as a table or dresser base. It's a great opportunity to create an outdoor display, mixing vintage pieces with small pots and containers showcasing plants that deserve to be admired at close quarters. In winter, this could be miniature cyclamen or a collection of heathers, to be exchanged in early spring for some choice hellebores or favourite snowdrops. Later, diminutive ivory narcissus 'Elka' or dwarf *Iris reticulata* would be good choices. In winter, incorporate some scented plants that will catch you unawares as you pass, such as sweet box (*Sarcococca confusa*).



UNDERNEATH THE ARCHES

There is something compelling about an arch – place one over a pathway and you will always feel drawn to pass under it. Choose a ready-made version (agriframes.co.uk, tristenmay.co.uk, garden-requisites.co.uk and secretgardensfurniture.com all make attractive versions), or train hedging plants such as yew to make an evergreen arch. Deciduous beech or hornbeam also adapt well to being trained – either as a single arch or repeated to form a tunnel. In winter their bare branches add strong structure to an entrance.



If you place an arch over a pathway, you will feel drawn to pass under it



GO FOR A QUIRKY GATE

An unusual rustic gate is a good way to stamp individuality onto a garden. Greenwood, where the natural grown shape of the wood has been left unchanged, makes for an original and organic effect that sits well in a country garden. Durable sweet chestnut and oak are the timbers most frequently used. Look for local coppice workers to supply suitable wood (find one near you at coppice-products.co.uk), or try bespoke gate makers such as edbrooks.com and greenmanwoodcrafts.co.uk. Old tools can find new life incorporated into gate design, too, well protected with exterior paint (left).



SLOW DOWN THE APPROACH

While a direct route to the front door might be the most practical option, it is good to have an excuse for a small detour around some interesting planting along the way. Where space allows, an island bed provides a good focal point and offers different layers of interest. Use a majority

of foliage plants with contrasting leaf shapes to provide a basis, supplementing them with seasonal flowering plants to punctuate the greenery. Even in a shady area you can create a lush green space with ferns, hostas, heucheras and pachysandra to give low-maintenance

ground coverage. In a smaller space, a single topiary bush or a flower-filled pot would work just as well. A change of hard surface helps to define areas and gravel is a good option as it is permeable, allowing water to drain away, which is an important environmental factor to consider.



KEEP IT SIMPLE

Understated colours are easy on the eye and create a harmonious first impression, especially if you keep to a limited palette for both planting and paintwork. Cool greys and natural creams used on walls and doors provide a great backdrop for everything from clipped evergreens to more exuberant sunbleached grasses and flowering perennials. Planting right up against the house always helps to soften the look and will bed your property down into the garden. ➔





NATURAL FRAMING

There is something particularly pleasing about entering a garden under a bower of foliage, setting the scene for whatever planting features there might be beyond. Ranged over a gate, it can turn even the simplest of entrances into something more substantial. Where privacy is an issue, you can achieve a degree of seclusion by growing an evergreen hedge, such as yew, so the path to your door can be glimpsed only via the gateway. On brick gate piers you could grow something quite substantial, such as a climbing hydrangea, *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris* (above, right), which is self-clinging. Although slow to establish, it will be quite happy in a shady area, producing lacy white flowers among heart-shaped glossy leaves. If choosing a climbing rose for a frequently used archway, opt for one that is relatively thornless, such as *Rosa* 'Veilchenblau' or 'A Shropshire Lad' so you don't snag your clothes as you pass by. 🌿



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