



SMALL SPACE BIG IMPACT!

A suburban garden on the outskirts of Manchester combines clever colour combinations with innovative lighting and specific plant choices to create a peaceful oasis and the illusion of space.

Words **Caroline Jones** Photography **Eleri Griffiths**



When Nick and Belinda White bought their detached house in Didsbury, the garden was little more than a small muddy space at the rear of their property with very little grass, shabby fencing and a few overgrown bushes. But the couple knew they wanted to start from scratch and create a stylish garden area that their two young children could play in, but which also looked fantastic. Initial enquiries led them to commission Manchester-based landscape designer David Keegan to transform the space.

“The brief was ‘really green, lush, easy to maintain and looks good,’” says Nick. “We spoke to a few different garden designers, but it was David’s enthusiasm that drew us to him. He knew what he was doing, his passion for plants was great and he was so easy to deal with.”

When David began the project there were two factors that he knew would be his main considerations when designing an inventive garden that would not only enhance its space but also look good. “The first was the style of the house,” explains David. “The style of the house pretty much dictates the whole approach that you

“IN A SMALL SPACE IT’S IMPORTANT TO HAVE A BACKDROP OF PLANTS THAT WILL ACTUALLY GO THROUGH THE WINTER AS WELL”

take to how the garden will end up looking. And the other thing was, because it’s a small space, I wanted to look at it in terms of maximising the amount of useable space for adults as well as kids.”

In order to get the most out of the area a key element in David’s design was the raised beds which border the garden – the entire edge of which can double up as a seating area if there are a lot of people in the garden. “A little trick like that means that in a small space you can get a lot more people in comfortably,” says David. “And it also brings the planting to a different level. The planting is virtually at the same level as the kitchen table. So when you’re dining, you’ve got a green backdrop.”

Nick and Belinda liked the idea of having a few flowers in the garden, but they didn’t want lots of them

– vital information that David established early on. “I go through the same process with all my clients,” he says. “After I’ve first met them and talked to them, I then develop a mood-book of different styles, colours and planting to get a clearer idea of the types of things that they like, which is how I came to end up using a lot of semi-tropical planting in this garden.”

Plant choice is particularly crucial when designing and landscaping a small garden, as David explains. “When I did the planting for Nick and Belinda’s garden I deliberately put in a lot of evergreens so that it wouldn’t look bleak in the winter. In a small space it’s important to have a backdrop of plants that will go through the winter as well. In a bigger space, you can afford to use seasonal planting, but with small gardens it’s just a completely different approach.” >>>

ADDRESS BOOK:

The garden was designed by David Keegan of David Keegan Garden Design & Build. Visit: www.dkgardendesign.co.uk, email info@dkgardendesign.co.uk or tel. 0161 950 9509.

OPPOSITE David chose a simple, predominantly green, colour palette for the Whites’ garden, with tropical splashes of yellow. The original perimeter fencing was replaced and the new fence panels and concrete posts painted black to diffuse the boundary. This backdrop also highlights the colours of the plants and offsets the lush greens. **ABOVE** The floor-to-ceiling glass patio doors open right up to extend the indoor space out and vice versa.

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A basic colour palette of white, blue and green was chosen to create the illusion of space and a simple, pared-down lighting scheme was also implemented. “My fear is, in a small garden, if you have too many colours it starts to make it look fussy,” says David. “You’ve got to keep to a palette of three or four colours. The white lights hidden behind plants give the space more depth and the colour combination of white and green helps to make a small garden feel bigger.”

A common issue with inner city gardens or small outdoor spaces in built-up areas is blocking out surrounding buildings that spoil the view and the ambiance of the garden. Shortly after Nick and Belinda moved into their Didsbury property a new building was built in their vista, in order to screen this out David was inventive with bamboo and the placement of trees. “The bamboo will eventually grow to about 4m high, so it’ll soften all of that,” says David. “And the silver birch in the corner will add vital screening without overshadowing the garden or closing it in, as the whole idea is to keep it open.”

As well as an abundance of plants and a contemporary design that compliments Nick and Belinda’s house, David also added a narrow-board hardwood deck, so that the couple could get maximum usage from their outdoor space. This not only provides a space that the kids can dash about and play on, but is also large enough to accommodate a dining table for alfresco meals. “The idea of using a slimmer board was a conscious decision,” says David. “I use a narrower board for the decking than usual because it makes the whole area look bigger. If I had used the standard size board it would actually have ended up looking very small, but with the slimmer board the area looks twice the size.”

It’s a clever little trick that clearly works, as Nick and Belinda are thrilled with their fantastic outdoor space, which has now gone from muddy and pokey to lush and spacious. “When my family turned up to see the new garden for first time they thought it was huge!” says Nick. “Compared to what it was they thought the transformation was amazing.”

CFL RECOMMENDED READ
RHS REALLY SMALL GARDENS



By Jill Billington. Published by Quadrille. Paperback. Available now. Price: £9.99 www.quadrille.co.uk

Providing essential information on how you can transform a small space with the aid of a few pots, a patio, some flower beds, a small water feature and even a tiny vegetable patch, *RHS Really Small Gardens* is a great read if you need help with ideas and advice on what to do with a tiny inner city garden. The book covers all key aspects from deciding what you want from your garden and making it fit the space you have, to using light and shade to make the area look bigger, the use of plants to create movement, shape and texture, plus showing you how to provide shelter and privacy without compromising on space.



A neat, small patch of grass, slim-board decking and a dual-function border create clean, crisp lines and a spacious-looking inner city garden.

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