Great outdoors

Masters of the green spaces, Chris Gaskin of The Fifth Room Garden Design and Keith Southall of Creative Landscapes, share their advice on creating the perfect garden

If designed with an expert eye, a garden can be a stylish and practical extension of the home which can be used all-year round, whatever the British weather brings.

We asked two experienced regional garden designers to share their tips and tricks on how to make the most of your green space.

THE FIFTH ROOM GARDEN DESIGN, STOURBRIDGE

The Fifth Room Garden Design is a family-run business which has been established for 15 years and offers a comprehensive design, build and maintenance service. Chris Gaskin and his team, which includes professional landscapers, have experience of designing all styles of gardens from small contemporary courtyards to large cottage gardens.

fifthroomgardendesign.co.uk

How should one go about choosing a garden designer?

A garden designer will have a well-balanced combination of flair, knowledge and experience. You should expect an experienced garden designer to ask many questions about your requirements. Do you want a family garden? Do you want a garden that is modern and low maintenance? Does it need to be pet friendly? Do you want a garden to entertain? I would always recommend looking at the designer's website to see if they have the style you are hoping for. Find out who your friends have used, what they liked and didn't like, and then meet up with several before finding the person you click with.

What type of service can people expect when they employ The Fifth Room Garden Design?

Our family-run company has been established for 15 years and we employ four experienced gardeners/landscape gardeners. We produce imaginative and practical creations for all aspects of gardening to include garden designs through to construction and planting. Our clients are often repeat customers or have been recommended. All our staff are professional, friendly and ensure work is completed to a high standard. We are often booked in advance which is a reflection of those standards .

Can you share any tips or tricks for making the most of your green space?

Whether you decide to employ the professional services of a garden designer or complete the work yourself, it is always best to have a plan. It doesn't mean that you have to get all the work completed in one go, but at least it can be done in stages and as the work evolves you can make slight changes. This also applies with a professional design, if the budget is such that you can only do certain areas at a time that is fine, but at least with a design, you will know what you eventually hope to achieve.

No matter what size or shape your outdoor space is, you can obtain the perfect garden to suit your needs.

Chris Gaskin

Contemporary style in Stourbridge

The client wanted a living space for entertaining nearer to the recently extended kitchen. The brief was for a modern, contemporary design maximising the space available. After the consultation, a design was completed and approved. The existing pond was enlarged and we created a stepping stone path across it. The main patio incorporated raised borders with rendered built walls and a built in fire/oven which helped to create the "room outside". We have used porcelain slabs which are becoming very popular as they are durable and create a really clean and modern look. The planting scheme has been kept crisp and minimal to avoid the space looking cluttered. The furniture was chosen to help compliment the design and provide the perfect place to entertain family and friends.

Keith Southall

CREATIVE LANDSCAPES, HARTLEBURY

Creative Landscapes has been established for more than 40 years, designing beautiful gardens and constructing them using their own garden landscaping teams. Owner Keith Southall manages his own teams of specialists in brickwork, stonework, woodwork, pool and water features, as well as dedicated planting and soft landscaping teams who use plants from their own nursery at Whitlenge Gardens. ***creativelandscapes.co.uk***

How should one go about choosing a garden designer?

I would definitely recommend using an Association of Professional Landscapers member for total piece of mind. They vet the members annually and have very strict rules which protect the public from rogue traders, of which there are too many, and it is too late when you spot halfway through a build that you have one. Being a member of the APL means you are of the very highest standard to ensure a great finished project to an agreed budget.

What type of service can people expect when they employ Creative Landscapes?

We have been designing and building gardens for over 40 years and are one of the very few firms who can keep everything 'in house', all within one company. We keep with the client from initial consultation stage, to design stage through to the complete build and then, from our well-stocked nursery, we source and plant the garden to complete the project all in one go. We have teams trained in all aspects from brick and stonework, patio laying, to ponds and water features of all sizes. We have a full in-house design service so we can show you what we propose before we start the build.

Can you share any tips or tricks for making the most of your green space?

The correct planting scheme is paramount. Always work with the foliage of the plants first, not the flowers. This will create an all year round garden rather than a two to three month wow of flowers then nothing. We are trained to use the leaf colour before we use flower, so lots of silver, purple and variegated leaves. Then within this mix there will be evergreen and evergold etc for winter and then flowering deciduous for the spring and summer. This is the golden rule – whether you have 10 acres or 10 feet the planting is the crucial element.

Evesham Gothic folly

This was a Cotswold garden with a beautiful black and white property to the side which was in view from the client's garden. We sourced a local Cotswold stone and built a water wall with five separate waterfalls cascading down over the stones. This wall of water drowned out any traffic noise and provided audio privacy between the client and the neighbours. We added depth by placing a Gothic mirror on the folly and we then built in a fully functional pizza oven with elevated slate sides for food preparation. Finally we incorporated a circular patio and wrapped a planter wall around the lower section for a sunken garden effect. This took around 10 weeks.

Harborne showstopper

This client wanted a showpiece at the end of their large flat garden, so we elevated the area and incorporated a set of feature steps in a half moon shape, with stone balustrading and two patios behind with a mock Temple gazebo in between. The lawn was re-levelled to allow their young children to play. We then brought the white rendered feature walls of the balustrading closer to the house by having a central water feature and a cherub to link all the garden together. This project took five to six weeks to complete.