

HOW TO...

MAKE THE MOST of a NORTH-FACING GARDEN

North-facing gardens can often be shady and therefore require specific treatment by your landscaper and garden designer. Chris Stone, managing director of Bushy Business sheds light on how to make the most of the space...

Flick through any garden magazine and it tends to be all about billowing herbaceous borders, wildflower meadows, kitchen gardens, decks, patios, pools and hot tubs, and they all have one thing in common – sun.

It would seem that all of the most desirable spaces are bathed in the golden stuff (when it makes an appearance). And this, to a point, is understandable – after all, who builds a swimming pool in deep shade?

However, if you have a north-facing garden none of this is of much help – it may seem like you are the forgotten ones, forced to sit outside on the front doorstep in a bid to catch some rays.



Small north-facing garden designed by Matt Keightley and built by Rosebank Landscaping



Choose planting wisely and it will thrive

● **THE SUN-SHADE RATIO** will depend upon whether you are truly north-facing or not, and also on the size of the garden, proximity of other buildings, heights of hedges and fences, and whether there are any trees nearby.

● If you have a large garden you will find that you are much less affected by the aspect as you are able to enjoy sun in different areas; smaller gardens do not necessarily offer this benefit.

WHEN IT COMES TO PLANTING do not be tempted to buy plants that like anything other than shade, unless you have a spot that is sunny for a few hours a day. No matter how much you try, any such plants are doomed to perform badly – instead embrace ‘the green’. There is a plethora of suitable trees, plants, shrubs and even grasses that enjoy shade, and you will be blessed with a lush rich green tapestry of jungle-like foliage.

Plant power

Choose plants that can thrive in shadier spots



Mirrors are used to reflect the space in this small town space designed and built by Acacia Gardens

‘Whilst you cannot change the orientation of a garden, there’s plenty that you can do to make your garden a much more inviting and useable space’

as these areas are perfect for seating, if only to enjoy the warmth on a summer’s morning or in the fleeting sunshine in the evening.

● IF YOU KNOW YOU HAVE A SHADY GARDEN then prepare accordingly – add a chimenea, a fire pit, or even build an outdoor fireplace (as shown on the previous page). It is surprising how cosy you will feel and how much heat the fire will push out. You could also keep some warm blankets at hand in your outdoor seating area for when the temperature gets a bit cooler.

● You will need paving to the rear of your house, but your main terrace or deck should be where you are able to maximize any sun you do get – no matter how fleeting.

With so many new-build houses offering much smaller gardens and the houses on these developments being crammed full, there are more and more shady gardens. Although you cannot change the orientation of a garden, there is plenty that you can do to make your garden a much more inviting,

useable space – one that you will love to spend time in.

Typically, it will be against the back of your house where the deepest shade is. Further down the garden you are more likely to find sun – even if for a short period of time throughout the day. Pay attention to this very carefully

SUCH AS FERNS, STATEMENT PLANTS like *Dicksonia antarctica* (tree ferns), *Hostas*, *Farfugium* and *Euphorbia* will provide that jungly feel. *Tiarella*, *Mahonia* and *Pulmonaria* will give flower, and climbers like *Trachelospermum* will perform well in the shade.



Dicksonia antarctica



Mahonia



Pulmonaria



Trachelospermum



Seating around a fire pit can be cosy and inviting, garden designed by Lara Behr Garden Design and built by Edward Davies Design

● ADDING A STRUCTURE such as a pergola with a louvered or retractable roof will give you as much light as possible during the day and a covered space for later in the afternoon or evening. Add patio heaters to this as well as lighting and you can extend the use of your garden year-round.

● Any paving or decking used should be a light colour to keep that area bright and a water feature is a great addition as it will reflect available light. As well as light paving, it is possible to paint the exterior walls white or a light shade to bring some brightness in. Another clever trick to reflect light and something right on trend are garden mirrors. Add these in a space where you get some sun and it will instantly brighten the space. Glass or stainless steel sculpture will also give a similar effect.

● IT IS POSSIBLE TO CULTIVATE LAWN in the shade, but it takes extra care and attention – if you have mainly moss, embrace it. It takes very little maintenance and is great for the environment. We advise against artificial lawns – although they can be seen as a practical option, we are not fans. If a lawn is not a possibility, how about an area with light-coloured decorative aggregate? It becomes a useable space with little maintenance.



Keep paths and paving in whiter tones to reflect light

● If you have large trees, you may be able to create some light by pruning low branches or thinning out higher branches to lift the canopy (if there’s a Tree Preservation Order you may need permission from the council). If your neighbour’s trees or hedges are getting out of control and blocking too much light, politely ask them to think about doing the same. Fencing can make you feel closed in, but you can borrow some light by installing batten

TOP TIPS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Add in some reflective components such as mirrors, glass and stainless steel
- 2 Make the garden cosy with a fire pit and blankets
- 3 Raise the canopy on overbearing trees
- 4 Change block fencing for batten style, screens or trellis instead to borrow light from beyond the boundary
- 5 Choose a light colour palette for paving and aggregates
- 6 Choose shade-loving plants if you want them to thrive
- 7 Embrace and enjoy your shady garden for what it is

fencing or trellis which will let more light through.

Surely, if there is one thing that we have all learnt recently it is how important outdoor spaces are to us – so why let the fact that your garden is north-facing stop you from making the most of it? DG

ABOUT BUSHY BUSINESS

Surrey-based Bushy Business offers all manner of landscaping and garden services, including design, build, planting, and maintenance. The company was founded in 1996 by Chris Stone and is this year celebrating 25 years in business.

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