

# FORMAL GARDEN



Many gardeners think formal gardens require more work than others. You can see in our Formal Garden that it isn't necessarily so. With thoughtful plant selection and placement, formal gardens can provide a feeling of awe and wonder, while reducing the work and water needed to maintain it. In a relatively small area, many of The Garden's resource management strategies come into play here. Our Formal Garden can be entered from two directions, by a path near the Crepe Myrtle grove or through the welcoming archway seen here. A peaceful, lovely spot to explore or simply rest and enjoy nature. You can have a similar garden to this one at home, too. Spend a little time here and discover parts of it that fit your likes and lifestyle. With so many techniques and strategies used here, there is something for everyone—even a bit of whimsy for kids of all ages. We share formal garden tips ,and a selection of plants from this collection, on the following pages.

## Rest and Reflection



One of the first things that comes to mind when you see a formal garden is the sense of order and arrangement. It's neat, tidy, and clean. If it's your garden, you feel like you can relax and enjoy it because it isn't screaming at you to do yard work. It calls for you to relax and calmly contemplate your world. We have strategically placed a bench in a shady spot in our Formal Garden just for that purpose. We invite you to take a moment and enjoy the beauty surrounding you in this serene spot. You might just get the feeling that everything makes sense and that life is in order.

## FORMAL GARDEN (continued) Geometrics



Squares- Formal gardens are known for displays of interesting patterns and shapes. It gives the garden a look of design planning that other types of gardens don't offer. In our Formal Garden, we've turned the ground beneath the Crepe Myrtle trees into a giant checkerboard. It catches your eye and invites you in where you can imagine a life-size game of chess; a perfect past time in a formal garden. The checkerboard takes on a completely different look when the trees are bare, compared to full foliage as seen here as when in full bloom. It's the area of most seasonal change in our Formal Garden.



Arcs- Two of the most common patterns found in formal gardens are arcs and circles. The clean appearance of formal gardens can look and feel rigid. Areas of arcs and circles soften the look and feel. Arcs can be solid or filled with bands of contrasting colors, materials and plants as seen here. Using plants with different foliage colors and shapes adds interest. The bowl containers in the back row add depth and dimension. The mosaic band is made of re-purposed flagstone. And painted river rock adds eye-catching color. The ground cover in the foreground makes the succulents between the stones look like stars!



Materials- When selecting materials for defining shapes in your formal garden, don't forget re-purposing left overs from other projects. Pieces of flagstone, bricks, pavers and tile can be used to define edges or layers in an arc or other shape. Then using plants with different sizes and colors completes the design. This is where you can get creative. Most formal gardens use only a few different types of materials and plants, which boosts the formal look. We used several to encourage you to express yourself and design your formal garden any way you want, including reusing left overs. We're big fans of up-cycling.

## FORMAL GARDEN (continued) Shapes & Styles



Paths & Edging- Paths can be straight or curved depending on the look you are going for. Many formal gardens have straight paths, increasing the feeling of formality. Our Formal Garden has curved paths for a flowing feeling inviting you to relax and reflect. We use several types of edging here as well, so you can see how they look installed. This will help you decide the best fit for your garden. Bender-board or metal edging (seen here) is crisp and clean. It requires a bit more effort to install correctly, but clearly defines edges and lasts a long time. Perfect for a garden you know will be staying exactly as is for years.



Edging materials- Flagstone and pavers turned on their sides make excellent edging and can allow for a varied layout, different widths and different colors within the same edging line. They can also have a section replaced with other materials or even plants to give it a completely different look. Using stone of any kind can be tiring work due to the weight involved and the effort to piece the “puzzle” together. But the final look can be attractive and compliment your formal garden well. And if you decide to change anything about the design involving the edging, you can work with small areas at a time.



Decorative Bark and Color- Bark is typically used to dress the soil for retaining water and resisting weeds. But it can be a design feature and benefit the soil and plants at the same time. Because decorative bark comes in different colors, you can create any pattern or shape you can dream up. You are only limited by how far your imagination takes you. Here you see two options, a single color bark (natural), or two colors of bark (natural and red), each covering a large area. For our checkerboard pattern, we used pressurized boards to outline a grid, then filled the squares with alternating natural or red colored bark.

## FORMAL GARDEN (continued) Containers



Bowls- Any container will do, but we have found that bowls add to the effect of the rounded edges of arcs and circles, giving a softer, more relaxed feel to our Formal Garden. However, if you have a particular look in mind, remember that containers come in many shapes, sizes and colors, or even design patterns, that will add diversity and interest to your formal garden. An important advantage of adding some containers, is that some plants have specific soil moisture needs and containers allow you to control watering for those planted in containers. They are also less vulnerable to ground critters.



Bird Baths- It's no surprise we like to up-cycle at The Garden. In fact, we've mentioned it here already. But one of our favorite projects is to take a bird bath and turn it into a container planting. Let's face it, sometimes keeping a bird bath clean and filled can be challenging. Why not turn it into a planter that will attract pollinators and add beauty? In this case we selected a single plant to adorn the bird bath and placed it in the sun. Because bird baths are not typically too big to move, they can easily be relocated if you decide to change the sun exposure.



Fountains- If you find yourself feeling more water conscious, that's a good thing. But it doesn't mean your old garden fountain's new home should be a landfill, far from it! Like birdbaths, fountains make perfect feature structures in a formal garden. If it's a larger fountain, it might be just the center piece you're looking for, like this one. Located in the center of our Formal Garden, it is an absolute treasure. Those who planted and maintain it will tell you to fill it with "spillers, fillers, and thrillers" for a dramatic addition to your formal garden. Soon you'll have beautiful textures and colors cascading from its basins.

## FORMAL GARDEN (continued) Structures



Gazebo- Structures add interest to formal gardens and, in this case, a gathering spot. This smaller gazebo (smaller than the main gazebo in The Garden) is big enough for three or four folks to enjoy a peaceful brunch, yet small enough for a peaceful retreat for one. Its prominent location near the Formal Garden entry arch accents the garden with white architecture which elevates the formal look. This gazebo is frequently decorated for seasonal holidays, so visit it often for an added surprise. Gazebos like this one come in kits that can be put together as a DIY project. Just make sure you start with a good foundation.



Topiary Twist- One of the hallmarks of formal gardens is a topiary, or collection of them. They look amazing and really add interest. Topiary looks like hard work, but once trained into a shape, they only require light pruning to maintain them. Usually an early or late summer trim is enough, although some may require a second trim. It's light pruning, sort of like giving a hair cut. It can be very therapeutic. Several plants are perfect for topiary, like Japanese Holly shrub, Dwarf Myrtle, and Boxwood shrub (seen here). These shrubs fill in nicely and are fairly easy to shape and trim.



Crown Prince- Speaking of adding interest with topiary. Many formal gardens have sculptured shapes of topiary, like swirls, balls, boxes, pillars and pyramids. But some special gardens are graced by animals living there. Meet “Leo the Lion”, ruler of our Formal Garden. Leo is grown out of Dwarf Myrtle, with a variegated Dwarf Myrtle for his mane. He even has a watchful eye to look over his kingdom. Leo is also elevated on a stone block thrown. Located in the center of our Formal Garden he is undoubtedly royalty, but at the same time, a touch of whimsy. Children of all ages enjoy dropping by to pay homage to Leo.

## FORMAL GARDEN (continued) Highlighted Plants



Meerlo Lavender (*Lavender allardii*)  
Highly fragrant. Considered the most heat and drought tolerant lavender.



Green Island Ficus (*Ficus microcarpa*)  
Dwarf shrub. Low maintenance. Slow growing. Heat and drought tolerant.



Petite Salmon Oleander (*Nerium oleander*)  
Dwarf shrub. Low water and maintenance needs. Annual blooms.



Japanese Boxwood (*buxus microphylla*)  
Low maintenance shrub. Easy to shape. Moderately drought tolerant.



Gray Leaf Gazania (*Gazania tomentosa*)  
Ground cover. Low maintenance. Yellow, daisy-like flowers spring to fall.



Lesser Bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea glabra*)  
Drought resistant. Prefers dry, hot climate. Can bloom year-round.



Gollum Jade (*Crassula ovata*)  
Succulent with finger-shaped, red-tipped leaves. Leaf tips look like suction cups.



Mexican Snowball (*Echeveria elegans*)  
Evergreen succulent. Can grow to cover ground with tight rosettes over time.



Giant Hens & Chicks (*Echeveria gigantea*)  
Succulent with compact rosettes. In less sunny areas, rosettes tend to open more.