

Water gardens

CALM AND REFLECTIVE or bold and dramatic, water creates a powerful effect, whatever the design intention. Use it to enliven a space with a cascade thundering into a pool below, or create a still pond fringed with plants or featuring a single water lily to convey a sense of peace and tranquillity.

Dramatic effects

Of all the features that can be included in a garden, water is the most powerful. One of the natural elements that collectively cradle human life, it is unsurprising that water has such a profound effect on our sense of wellbeing, compelling us to embrace all it has to offer. Creatively, it is the chameleon of the garden. Amorphous and fluid, water assumes both its shape and character from how it is used: dark and reflective, languid and romantic, playful and capricious, or dramatic and forceful, it conveys the style and tone of the garden's design. The sounds it produces are as diverse as its visual qualities, with notes ranging from high-pitched drips to a melodious gurgle and cacophonous crash.

Wherever water is located it will attract wildlife, helping us to connect with nature. While a splash pool will act as a welcome stop for passing birds, more permanent bodies of water will support complex and important ecosystems. Properly managed, even a small pond will become a significant nature reserve, especially when linked to other sites in the neighbourhood.

While water features are frequently included as incidental focal points, like pieces of sculpture, a water garden is any design where the ornamental or creative use of water predominates. Schemes can be culturally

influenced by historical precedents to suit the architecture or landscape, or they may be contemporary, using this fluid medium to relay something new and distinctive. But even in modern gardens, water features are informed by techniques that were devised thousands of years ago. Many designers also draw on historic designs for inspiration, reinventing them using the latest materials, technologies and styling.

Water gardens through history

Water has been an integral part of garden design for many centuries. Essential to life, clean water is a precious commodity, especially where it is scarce in areas such as the Mediterranean region, Arabia and southern India. Deeply embedded in religious and social culture, its ornamental use was historically regarded as a privilege, reserved for the wealthiest in society.

Some of the first water gardens were created by the Chinese over 3,000 years ago. They evolved an asymmetric garden style, creating stylised evocations of the surrounding mountainous landscape, with rocks, trees and water laid out according to carefully devised rules and conventions. Japanese water gardens evolved from the Chinese style in the 9th and 10th centuries, and their influence is referenced in the work of many contemporary designers from both Asia and the West

A contemplative reflective pool of shallow water creates a moat around an intimate patio. A filtration system was fitted here to keep the water clean and clear, and to maintain the pebble effect.

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