



HELEN YOUNG

## Perfectly formed

BIG IDEAS FOR A SMALL SPACE

**T**his creative reimagining of a small, urban garden space is a triumph of planning over multiple challenges. The Sydney terrace house, owned by a professional couple with school-age children, had a glass-walled, internal courtyard flanked by kitchen, living room and hallway, but the precious space lacked style and substance. The brief to landscape designer Steve Warner was for "somewhere to relax outdoors", including a pet-friendly space for the family dog and four cats.

Warner and his team at Outhouse Design rose to the task, going on to win Gold and Best in Category for the project at the 2019 Australian Institute of Landscape Designers and Managers Awards. The hurdles they had to overcome at the property in inner-west Stanmore included privacy issues caused by a neighbour's elevated windows, drainage problems with the existing floor on a concrete slab and a courtyard microclimate that ranged from hot sun to deep shade.

To top it all, access was difficult. "Everything had to come and go through the kitchen door," says Warner with a laugh. The bespoke, oversized copper and weathered steel planters he designed to bring strength of character to the space and enable sheltering trees to grow had to be transported in pieces and then bolted together *in situ*. The same applied to the overhead structure designed for privacy – a curved, laser-cut steel screen that allows in plenty of light and incorporates a seating platform that doubles as a daybed.

A raised water feature, made with recycled bricks and railway sleepers to blend with the home's

character, creates another layer of interest (the pets like to drink from it too). Texture was added to the flooring with sections of composite timber sleepers cut into the original tiles. The clients wanted to recycle and reuse wherever possible, and to incorporate favourite artefacts collected on their world travels.

The planting combinations respond to the seasonal changes within the courtyard. Two crepe myrtle trees offer summer shade and flowers, autumn leaf colour and sinuous bare limbs in winter that allow in the sun. *Plectranthus* 'Mona Lavender', *Rhaphiolepis* 'Snow Maiden', *Hoya*, peace lilies and *Pittosporum* 'Miss Muffet' flower at



Photography Katriine Mardini



Character: laser-cut screen; daybed; weathered steel planters



various times. Groundcovers include *Dichondra* 'Silver Falls', *Viola banksii*, *Lamium* 'White Nancy' and *Myoporum* 'Yareena'.

Bifold doors open up the lounge room and kitchen to the courtyard. "You get a different experience of it from different rooms," says Warner. "As you walk through the house you're drawn to the courtyard."

"It took ages to design," he confesses. "I wanted to make a comfy and tactile space where you could sit down within the garden, with plants enveloping you... I think it has a really nice balance of strength, size and scale with the surrounding rooms. It flows with the house, but has its own identity."

Why do all our carrots grow into peculiar, distorted shapes?

Alison Forbes, Melbourne

When carrots are forked rather than straight it's usually from too much fresh manure or organic matter; they have a low need for fertiliser. They can also fork in heavy or stony soil. A light, friable, deep soil is needed.

All the lettuces I've tried to grow over the past months go to seed within a few weeks despite regular water, afternoon shade protection and good soil. Any hints for growing lettuce to maturity over summer?

Barry Powells, Coffs Harbour NSW

Lettuces, particularly hearting varieties, prefer cooler climates with day temperatures below 20°C. In hot climates, in summer, you need to modify. Grow heat-tolerant, loose-leaf types, especially oakleaves such as

'Royal Oak Leaf' and 'Darwin', or the butterhead type 'Buttercrunch'. Grow them in shady parts of the garden or interplant with taller vegetables or erect

shade structures. Mulch with sugar cane and keep well watered as stress makes them bolt to seed. For sweet, tender leaves, grow leafy greens fast, applying high-nitrogen, soluble fertiliser and Seasoil weekly.

My 40-year-old bottle tree has flowered and is setting seed. What's the best way to germinate them?

Vicki Park, Brisbane

*Brachychiton rupestris* develops boat-shaped pods that split when ripe to reveal the large seeds. Wear gloves as they have irritant hairs. To help break the hard seed coat, cover in boiling water and soak overnight. Seeds should swell. Sow to the depth of the seed into sandy propagating mix. Keep moist but not wet. Germination takes 10-21 days at the optimum temperature of 18-22°C.



Send your questions to: [helenyoungtwig@gmail.com](mailto:helenyoungtwig@gmail.com) or Helen Young, PO Box 3039, Willoughby North, NSW 2068. Website: [helenyoung.com.au](http://helenyoung.com.au). The best question for December/January wins a Leatherman Free T4 with 12 tools, worth \$140.