

HOME

GREAT GARDEN TIPS FROM THE PROS

BY MARY KATE HOGAN



Garden Secrets

Great tips for all those green thumbs around Greenwich itching to dig in the dirt

With gardening season right around the corner, we talked to some top landscape architects and garden pros to tap their wisdom and help you plan for the greener days ahead. These local experts shared their ideas for bringing new life to your property with a fresh crop of plant picks, growing tips and more.

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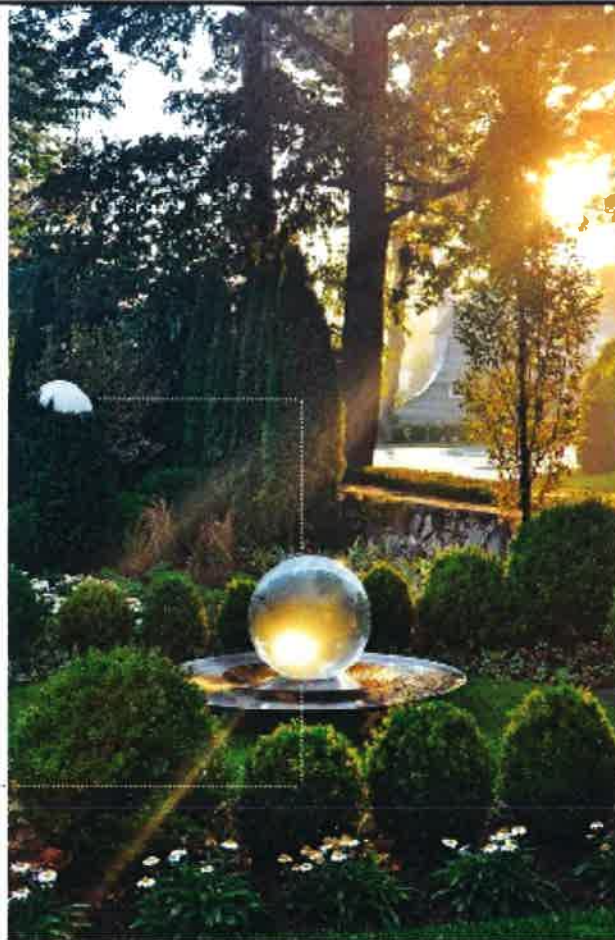
ADD VISUAL INTEREST & APPEAL

PATTERN

Sean Jancski, of **SEAN JANCSKI LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**, advises adding a design pattern into paved or wood landing or a walkway. "Paving patterns can be used to direct the attention to a specific area or as a method of guiding one through a space, or to create a node or stopping point in a long path," says Sean.

SCULPTURES & WATER FEATURES

Placing a sculpture in a landscape creates a point of interest and directs the eye to that location, says Sean.



LIGHTING

"Lighting is very important, not only in the summer but especially in the winter to illuminate tree branches," says Roberto Fernandez of **ROBERTO FERNANDEZ LANDSCAPING**, who considers lighting a critical element in the garden.



HEDGES

These living walls help to define a space and give the feeling of being in an outdoor room. A few ways to fashion hedges? "A row of trees with the canopies touching creates a green wall on top and an open view through the bottom below the canopy," says Sean, "while a row of shrubs creates a green wall throughout and can be used as screening."



MOTION

There's more to a garden than plants and hardscape. "We love to add elements that create motion. Too many landscapes are static scenes that might as well be paintings on the wall," says

John Conte of CONTE & CONTE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS,

who recommends introducing sound and movement for a more vibrant landscape. "Water features are a favorite way to provide sound, movement and even a place for wildlife to visit. Wind chimes and kinetic sculptures are another easy option to create a graceful, relaxing visual destination for your wandering eye." Certain plants can also bring motion to the garden. "The silver linden, for example, has shimmering leaves that flash alternating colors in the slightest wisp of wind, making the landscape appear to sparkle," says John. "Ornamental grasses bend and sway with the wind deep into winter, well after most other foliage has fallen."

TOP: LARRY STANT; MIDDLE: COURTESY OF JOHN JAIN; BOTTOM: JAIN

CONSIDER THESE UNIQUE IDEAS

SIMPLIFY FOR A SOOTHING VIEW

To create a peaceful vista, consider reducing the number of colors that vie for your attention, says landscape architect **SUSAN COHEN**. "Recently I have begun changing the color scheme in my own backyard, replacing a variety of plantings with a simple palette of green and creamy shades of yellow," she says. "Though I haven't eliminated old favorites, like the bright yellow daylily 'Happy Returns' or the lovely blue bells of Clematis 'Betty Corning,' or the purple alliums that I remember from my mother's garden, I have increased the number of pale yellow flowers." Among Susan's new favorites: annual cosmos 'Xanthos' and nasturtium 'Buttercream' for sun and *Nicotiana glauca* for shade. "Physalis 'Moonraker' is an old friend, and I now plant it generously in several places. My goal this spring is to find a hardy baptisia in the palest shade of yellow. With this simpler color scheme, my garden has become cohesive, and, most important to me this year, calmer."

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOXWOOD

As much as we love classic boxwoods, they can be overused. Which plants are underrepresented in today's gardens? Roberto Fernandez points to rhododendrons, azaleas, small spruce and taxus as strong evergreen options, though taxus should be planted where there's appropriate fencing because it's tempting to deer. He notes that while boxwoods are very popular, they have been harder to source in recent years due to demand, and blight has also been an issue (his team sterilizes its tools to protect against spreading disease). He also likes new hydrangea hybrids and Japanese maples.

"Native plants are still underrepresented in most suburban landscape designs," says Kim Conte of Conte & Conte and Fairfield House & Garden. "For so long it was about exotic hybridization. Now we're coming back to our roots and the rewards are great—more birds and butterflies, fewer chemicals, less need for fertilization." Some examples include the shrubs American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*) and Northern spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) as well as flowering perennials such as turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) and blue-eyed grass (*Solidago caesia*).

To make a statement with trees or shrubs that can grow in a tight space, Sean Jancski suggests espalier plantings to create a green wall and make a plain facade come to life. Espalier can be trained to grow on a lattice or with wiring. Specimen shrubs and trees (for example, a flowering tree) can be used as sculpture within a landscape.



BEAT THE GARDEN PESTS

Put down the spray bottle, says **John Conte**, who notes that it's often better to let nature take its course. "An overly eager gardener may feel the need to intervene at the first sign of a leaf spot or an insect, but most plants are quite well-equipped to handle a bit of parasitic activity on their own," he says. "The key is to arrange your landscape and garden with the right plants in the right places. If the soil, water and light conditions are appropriate for the types of plants you are trying to grow, they will do a very good job of defending

themselves and thriving. But if a plant is struggling in poor soil or is mismatched for its environment, that's when trouble occurs. Good planning is a much better strategy than chemical intervention."

If you're trying to protect your garden from deer and other furry creatures, welded wire mesh fencing deters small animals yet it disappears into the landscape, so it doesn't ruin the view, says Sean Jancski. **John Conte** also likes motion sensors such as water cannons that turn on when a deer enters the protected zone. John jokes, "Makes for good fun, too, when your mother-in-law tries to steal your peonies."

RESOURCES

Conte & Conte Landscape Architects and Fairfield House & Garden
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203-661-8900

Susan Cohen Landscape Architect, author of *The Inspired Landscape*,
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