

NEW ZEALAND IN A NUTSHELL

This one-time cramped, shady London back garden has been transformed into a home from home for its New Zealand owners

Like many urban gardens, this London back yard was small, overlooked, and exposed to noisy traffic in surrounding streets. It was further compromised by a difficult, north-facing aspect and poor soil. The challenge for designer Catherine Clancy was to turn it into a family-friendly garden with a degree of privacy that is also bright, open

Location

Greenwich, London

Size

Approx 50sq m,
L-shaped

Aspect & soil

North-facing; London
clay, sand and
imported soil

and with a contemporary feel. In addition, the owners, originally from New Zealand, wanted a bit of their homeland in the back garden, along with a vegetable patch.

In answer to this brief, Catherine decided to create a modern urban escape using chunky wooden sleepers for raised beds, smooth decking and grey limestone paving and to plant almost all New Zealand natives – with just the exception of the veg, an apple tree and herbs such as thyme, sage, rosemary and bay.

One of the first tasks was to repair the crumbling, soil-retaining brick wall along the boundary of the garden so that screening could be secured to it. This modern take on traditional trellis, made of horizontal open timber slats, adds height to the wall and provides the much-needed privacy without blocking light.

The garden is on a sloping site, so to break up the space and create visual interest

Left: Small ferns are underplanted with astelia and libertia

Plant list



*Libertia
peregrinans*

Catherine used the following plants in her New Zealand-inspired design:

Tree

Apple 'Queen Cox'

Shrubs

Astelia 'Silver Mound'
Astelia chathamica
Coprosma 'Karo Red'
Corokia x virgata 'Red Wonder'
Corokia x virgata 'Sunsplash'
Laurus nobilis
Leptospermum scoparium
 'Burgundy Queen'
Libertia ixiioides
Libertia peregrinans 'Gold Leaf'
Lophomyrtus x ralphii
 'Red Dragon'
Myosotidium hortensia
Phormium cookianum subsp.
hookeri 'Cream Delight'
Phormium tenax
Pittosporum tobira
Prostanthera cuneata
Pseudopanax 'Cyril Watson'
Rosmarinus officinalis
Salvia officinalis
Thymus vulgaris
Uncinia uncinata rubra



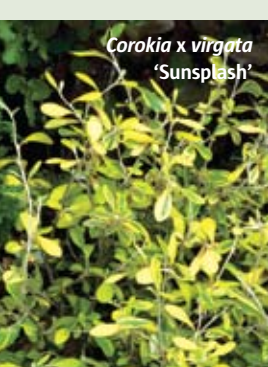
*Phormium
'Cream Delight'*



Uncinia uncinata

Ferns

Adiantum
Asplenium polyodon
Blechnum fluviatile
Cyathea dealbata
Cyathea smithii
Dicksonia antarctica
Hypolepis ambigua
Pellaea falcata
Pneumatopteris
Polystichum richardii
Pteris tremula
Todea barbara



*Corokia x virgata
'Sunsplash'*



Myosotidium hortensia



Catherine landscaped the area into three levels, the lowest of which provides a cosy, secluded, sunken corner paved with soft grey-blue limestone. This serves as a dining and entertaining space with sockets and facilities for a barbecue. Designing the levels so that their lines run at a 45° angle to the house also makes the garden appear much bigger.

Planting areas run along the sides of the garden and are in raised beds created by the sleepers. These vary in height from two sleepers high to four sleepers high and also double up

Above: Decking laid on the diagonal makes the garden appear larger

About the designer

Irish-born Catherine Clancy, previously an IT manager, moved into garden design seven years ago. Since then she has created award-winning gardens and featured on BBC TV. Her garden designs tend to have a strong organic structure and an abundance of planting to suit the site conditions, and are sustainable wherever possible – she uses local materials, encourages wildlife and the growing of vegetables. Contact her at Inspired Gardens: 07879 661923, www.catherineclancy.com.





Right: Before the transformation, the garden lacked privacy and had become a bit of an eyesore



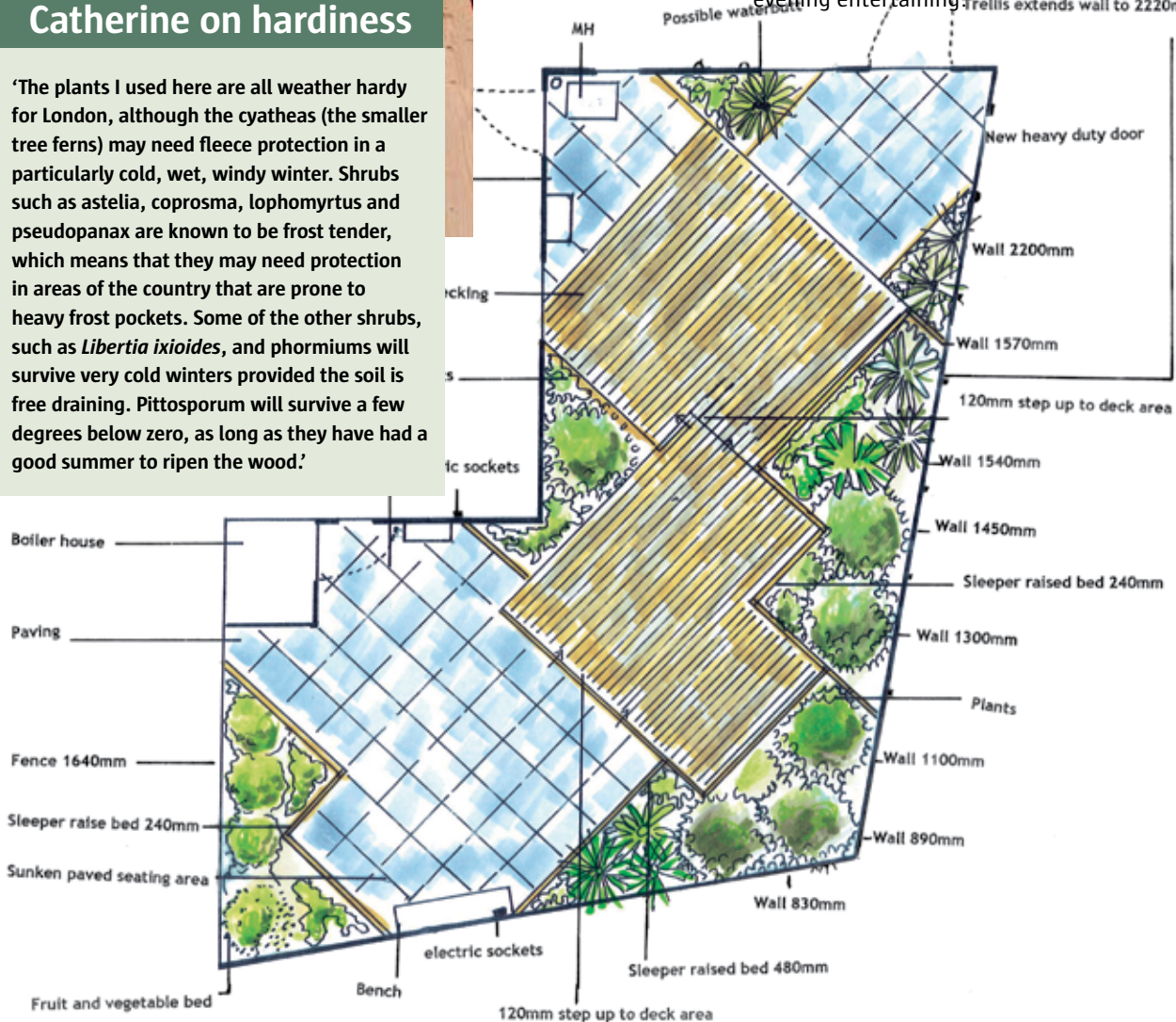
Below: A large phormium in a corner provides strong architectural interest



Catherine on hardiness

'The plants I used here are all weather hardy for London, although the cyatheas (the smaller tree ferns) may need fleece protection in a particularly cold, wet, windy winter. Shrubs such as astelia, coprosma, lophomyrtus and pseudopanax are known to be frost tender, which means that they may need protection in areas of the country that are prone to heavy frost pockets. Some of the other shrubs, such as *Libertia ixioides*, and phormiums will survive very cold winters provided the soil is free draining. Pittosporum will survive a few degrees below zero, as long as they have had a good summer to ripen the wood.'

as seats, as the owners didn't want to clutter the small garden with tables and chairs. An additional small bench was also built against the back wall. Grey-blue limestone pavers were also used to pave an area alongside the house, which is linked to the sunken corner by two 3 x 3m (10 x 10ft) decking platforms made of southern pine, providing wide, child-friendly steps down to it and the vegetable patch. Subtle spike spotlights enhance the garden for evening entertaining





Exotic planting

To increase the sense of enclosure and privacy, Catherine planted abundantly with lush, native New Zealand plants. Many are dramatic, architectural specimens to fit in with the contemporary, uncluttered theme, and the colour palette is limited to mostly greens and silver, with a few purple and yellow shrubs for contrast.

Shade-loving ferns grow happily in the north-facing garden, and some of them will cope with winter temperatures down to -15°C, as long as they are in a sheltered spot. This includes the large tree fern, *Dicksonia antarctica*, which will survive harsh winters provided it has a large, established trunk and is kept out of the drying wind. In addition, if

Above: The open-slatted trellis provides privacy without blocking the light

Above: The large tree fern, *Dicksonia antarctica*, can survive harsh winters once well established

Right: A raised bed for fruit and veg is sited in the sunniest part of the garden

Right: The purplish-red coprosma provides contrast in the mainly green and silver scheme



Catherine's tips for small spaces

- Introducing different levels adds visual interest and creates the illusion of more space.
- Make use of the vertical plane if possible, using the walls as planting space (for baskets and pots etc), and trees as supports for climbers.
- Splitting long, narrow gardens on the diagonal makes them appear wider.
- Build garden furniture into the design, for example raised beds that double up as seats.
- Simplicity is key: don't include too many different materials, and use a restricted colour palette for an uncluttered look.
- Choose plants carefully, such as a tree with interesting bark, autumn colour, good leaf structure and flowers/berries, or perennials that will flower and also provide interesting seed heads throughout winter. Also shrubs that have multiple seasons of interest.
- Don't use too many different plants, and include at least one variety that threads the whole garden together, such as the use of astelias in the New Zealand garden.
- Incorporate outdoor lighting into the design, which allows any small space to be used as an evening escape.

the trunk is sunk about 40cm (16in) into the ground, this will ensure that the roots can survive below the frozen ground during extreme cold spells. Plain-leaved phormiums are very tough and may tolerate temperatures down to -12°C if given a deep, dry winter mulch.

Some of the plants are borderline frost tender, such as astelia, coprosma, corokia, leptospermum (Tea Tree), *Libertia ixioides*, lophomyrtus, pittosporum and pseudopanax, but the London climate is usually mild enough to support them, provided they are sheltered from the wind and have the correct soil environment – that is, well-drained soil for the



shrubs so their roots don't rot during the colder months, and moisture-retaining soil for the ferns. In fact, a special soil mix of composted bark and topsoil was created for this site, to ensure that the ferns would thrive, and a leaky hose irrigation system was installed to satisfy their thirst. Catherine sourced all the ferns from World of Ferns in Wales, which had the range, size and quality of New Zealand natives she required.

A large phormium was planted in the windy corner, while two kiwi fruit vines, strawberries, some vegetables and herbs are happier in the raised bed nearest the seating area, which is the sunniest part of the garden.

Above left: The strappy leaves of *Astelia 'Silver Mound'* contrast with the feathery fronds of the ferns

Above centre: Garden designer Catherine (right) chats with the owner in her little patch of kiwi home

Above right: Raised beds vary in height to give added visual interest to the lush planting

Ferns for cold spots

As well as *Dicksonia antarctica* used in this garden, other hardy specimens include *Dryopteris wallichiana*, a tall – up to 1.2m (4ft) – fern that originates from the Himalayas. Many deciduous ferns will also be content to sit out bad winter weather under a mulch of composted bark chippings, in particular the high-altitude alpine ferns. And, of course, native British ferns will cope admirably with our cold winters. See the World of Ferns website, www.world-of-ferns.co.uk, for a wide range from the specialist nursery in North Wales.