



TRADITIONAL BEAUTY
Colourful cottage-garden planting is perfectly suited to this historic country home in the Cotswolds. Soft-blue paintwork on the door and pipework enhances the mellow stone and brings the look to life

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Follow these expert tips to give your front of house some serious kerb appeal



Your front door, and its surrounding outdoor space, creates that all-important first impression. 'Front gardens tend to be a formal face you present to the world, while the back is a more relaxed, private place,' says garden designer Robert Bratby.

Obviously, the style and condition of your property has an impact too, but planting can be used to enhance it, or even hide less-than-perfect areas.

Get planting

'A well-tended front garden will not only add value to your house, it will also give you joy every time you walk up the path,' says garden designer Catherine Clancy.

Many areas at the front of the house are too small for a lawn, but mixed planting can add green interest, she explains. 'Before you start digging, have a look at what your neighbours have done – it's important to fit in with the street. Try to strike a balance between structural evergreens and herbaceous planting.'

'Just as you would with the back garden, before choosing your plants, assess what sunlight the space gets and at what time of day, as well as the type of soil you have,' says Robert. And he adds that if space allows, a feature shrub or tree, such as an acer or rowan, is a good addition. 'If you have only the tiniest of plots, then use window boxes or position containers either side of the front door. Camellias, *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Lanarth White' and *Rosa* 'Gertrude Jekyll' are all good for pots. And don't forget that you can also fill them with spring bulbs for early colour.'

Keep it simple

As we don't tend to spend a great deal of time in our front gardens, it's a good idea to choose plants that are fairly self-reliant. The key is to plan for year-round interest, says Catherine. 'It's got to look as good in winter as in summer, so try evergreens, such as olive trees, which are drought-tolerant, yew hedging, which looks smart, and hardy climbers, such as star jasmine.'

Garden designer Sara Jane Rothwell advises limiting both plant and colour selection: 'Keeping the palette quite restrained makes small spaces feel less crowded, plus it makes maintenance easier.'

Safe and out of sight

If your home needs screening, either for security reasons or from prying eyes, try hedging. Yew and laurel are the most popular evergreens, while box is falling out of favour due to problems with box blight disease. Try *Pittosporum tenuifolium* or *Ilex crenata*, recommends designer Rosemary Coldstream. Deciduous options include beech and hornbeam. And to deter burglars, 'Go for pyracantha, holly or a climbing rose – nice and prickly!' she adds. ▶

WILD AND FREE

Agapanthus, anemones, hydrangeas, Carex grass and fennel contrast with the smart black door and window frames
WARM WELCOME
 Sandtex 10 year exterior gloss in vibrant Hot Mustard contrasts with terracotta pots

MAKE A STATEMENT

In this town garden (right), designer Rosemary Coldstream has created a country garden feel with billowing plants that spill over the paths. A blue door works with the purples in the planting for a vibrant, yet harmonious look





FLORAL IMPACT

These low-maintenance plants will all make a fantastic first impression, says garden designer Rosemary Coldstream



Libertia grandiflora Featuring lovely white flowers above evergreen foliage in May, this plant prefers sun or partial shade.

Astelia chathamica silver spear An evergreen perennial with beautiful silver-green spiky leaves.

Heuchera Choose green forms such as *Heuchera* 'Greenfinch' for wonderful textural contrast with small-leaved plants.

Hebe You can't go wrong with a hebe; they're evergreen and flower for months – and butterflies love them! Try *Hebe* 'Garden Beauty Blue', 'Mrs Winder' and 'Nicola's Blush' (top left), or 'Autumn Glory' for late flowering.

Heleborus x sternii This is an evergreen that flowers from February to April (centre left) and a good option for shady spots.

Grasses Try these if your front garden gets plenty of sun: *Pennisetum* 'Fairy Tails' or something taller, such as *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' and *Stipa gigantea*.

Easycare perennials Experiment with nepeta (bottom left), *Erigeron karvinskianus*, which flowers for ever – just give it a trim once a year in spring; or lavender, if you have good drainage.

Bulbs Plant a variety for a bit of zing in spring.



Park and drive

If you're planning to pave your front garden, use materials that are Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) compliant. This means any water will soak away or run off into the garden rather than out onto the footpath or road.

Gravel is a good option as it's free-draining, plus the noise it makes when it's walked on is an additional security measure. Add some greenery with feature beds or container planting. 'A border in front of the house will soften the architecture,' says Rosemary.

Lead the way

Paths to the front door should be well defined and easy to navigate. However, there's plenty of freedom to experiment with different materials and styles, from patterned tiles to herringbone bricks, contemporary slab paving to simple stone.

Make the path more of a feature by 'staggering' it, suggests garden designer Sara Jane. 'We will often offset the path, so that it has a direct path to the front door but the view is broken up with planting. This creates more interesting results.'

Warm welcome

Front doors and windows are a focal point of the exterior of the house and, if you're replacing them, it's worth taking into account the style and age of your property.

'Your front door provides an excellent opportunity to make a statement and choosing the perfect style can really boost the appeal of your home,' says Jill McLintock from Everest. 'Often this can be achieved with a bold colour or an interesting design. But be aware that combining both could be too much, and that the colours and patterns of your garden will change with the seasons. It's better to choose a door in a shade that suits both the style of your house and its surrounding outdoor space.'

These days, composite doors are the most popular. 'Their classic designs and wide range of glazing and colour options mean they suit most properties,' says Jill. 'They're very thermally efficient and low maintenance, and provide a classic timber look without the maintenance required for the real thing.'

Light up

'Path or step lights make dim or steep walkways easier to navigate, while box wall lights or exterior bracket lights by the front door create a welcoming first impression,' says Peter Bowles from Davey Lighting. 'Natural materials with interesting patinas, such as weathered bronze, copper and brass, are good choices for outdoor lighting as they're low maintenance and weather beautifully.'

Choose lights that are weatherproof and suitable for outdoor use, while motion-sensitive versions are useful if you don't want to leave them on permanently. ☑

PERFECT SYMMETRY

Simple galvanised-steel planters (above, left) placed either side of the door bring a classic look that suits both traditional and contemporary homes. These buckets look great when planted up and are £55 each from Garden Trading

BOLD LINES

This garden (right) has a minimalist, modern look that works well with the property's sleek lines, expansive glazing and striking grey stone. The Rondo V door by Urban Front has been painted a rich blue that brings the whole scheme together

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