



design your dream garden: part 2 – define the shapes  
It's time to give your design some shape.

# Set the Style

**D**o you dream of having a beautiful new garden? Like building a house, creating the garden of your dreams takes planning. We started with a site analysis in “Start from Scratch.” Check out “The story up ’til now” below for a recap. Now it’s time to start de-fining the shapes of the beds and other key elements.

## TAKE A CUE FROM THE HOUSE

Garden style ties the shapes of borders, structures and all the other elements together. The biggest structure in your garden

will most likely be the house, so that’s where to start. Many houses are a mix of styles, giving you lots of latitude when it comes to garden design. But if your house is well-defined, perhaps an English Tudor or a Colonial saltbox, you’ll want to keep the garden a similar style. A dramatic contrast, such as putting a Southwestern xeric landscape with that Tudor, may look out of place. However, choosing a style simply comes down to deciding what you like and what looks good.

## KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

It’s time to take several copies of the base map you’ve made and draw in the elements you chose. Before you sketch, ask yourself the “Questions of style,” on page 2 to help you set the look of your new garden.

Do more than one sketch so you can see how different shapes will fit together. Even though you have several base maps, be sure to keep an eraser handy — you’ll probably use it frequently!

You can see six options for the yard I’m planning on page 2. I started with three sketches that have curved forms. Then I did three with straight edges. With each sketch you can see what I like and some of the problems.

When I sketched ideas, I started with the patio area because it’s the largest element in the yard. Then I moved to the border around the back yard, fitting in the focal-point vegetable garden and the hideaway area in the far left corner. Next, I looked at the path along the side of the house. Since it’ll be used a lot, I want to make sure it looks good and is easy to navigate. And I sketched ideas for the front area last.

Keep practical considerations in mind as you start. For example, the new patio needs to connect the kitchen and living areas. I don’t want to carry food through the house or navigate a narrow zigzag path, especially if I have my hands full on the way to the patio table.

Don’t worry about perfect lines, or even exact measurements at this point; just draw in shapes and rough sizes to see how they look. Once you have several sketches put together, take them outside and walk through the garden. If it helps, drag out the hose or some twine and stakes to outline areas to picture your ideas better.

On the next pages I’ve refined the ideas you see here to come up with two designs — one with curves and one with straight lines. Let’s take a look at the process.

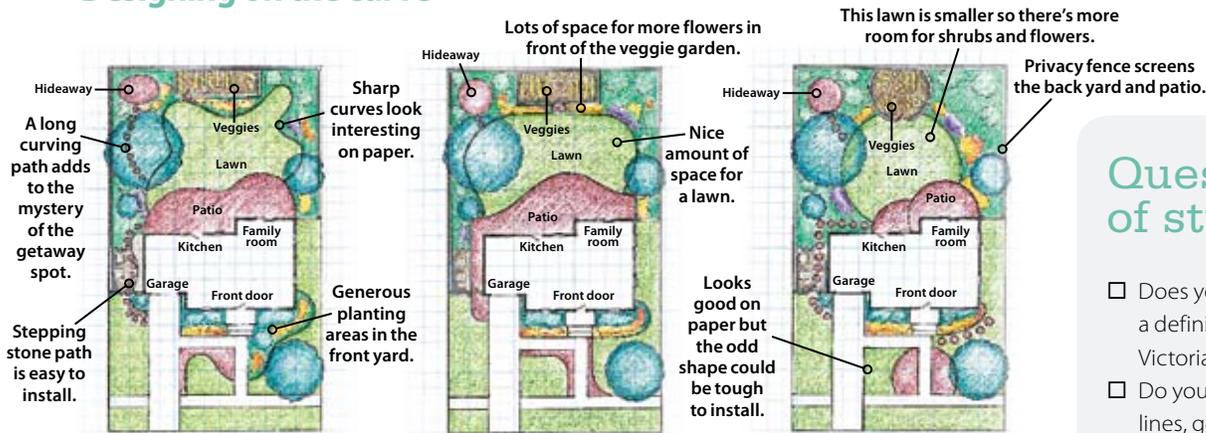
## The story up ’til now

In “Start from Scratch” I showed how to make a site analysis. First, you evaluate the permanent elements in your garden, such as the house, the driveway and existing trees. That information becomes a base map — a scale drawing you can use as you plan. Next, make a list of things you would like in your new garden. Then take those elements and organize them on the base map. This is the base map we settled on and are working from now.



# Experiment with lines and shapes

## Designing on the curve



### DRAMATIC CURVES

These curves give the garden a natural feel. And traveling the long path through the border to the hideaway will give the impression of a journey away from the house.

### GENTLE FLOW

Broad curves are easy to maneuver with the mower. I really like the curves where I want to expand the existing front sidewalk, too. They'll make the area look and feel much more welcoming to visitors.

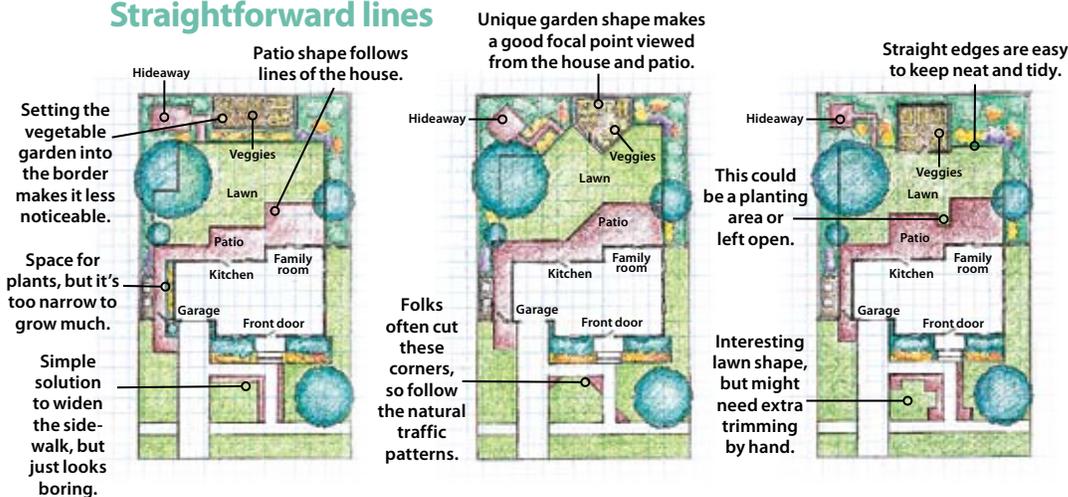
### CLASSIC CIRCLES

A circular lawn gives lots of open space around the beds. The stepping stone path from the patio would be easy to install, but may not be as easy to navigate as a solid surface. The round vegetable garden is intriguing — is it practical?

## Questions of style

- Does your house have a definite style, such as Victorian or Georgian?
- Do you prefer straight lines, geometric forms and well-defined corners, or natural, gently curving lines with no sharp angles?
- When you visit other gardens, do you like symmetrical balance where two or more elements match exactly, like a mirror image? Or is asymmetrical balance, where items in the garden relate to each other but are not identical, more appealing to you?
- Are you drawn to gardens where the style is loose and natural, with masses of plants and very few hard surfaces?
- Do you like to see individual, well-spaced specimen plants?
- When you think about structures in your garden, are they painted and ornate or left to weather naturally?
- Do you mow with a riding mower or a walk behind? Tight curves and angles may mean you need to go back and trim by hand.

## Straightforward lines



### SIMPLE LINES

The veggie garden is a good fit and has room in front to add a border of flowers or low shrubs. This plan would be quick to lay out, build and plant, especially for a do-it-yourself project.

### DRAMATIC DIAGONAL

Turning things on a diagonal adds excitement. The diagonals make for a unique vegetable garden and front sidewalk. And the simple lines of this patio would be easy to live with.

### A TRADITIONAL LOOK

An open space gives the patio the feeling of two separate areas. The veggie garden is a traditional shape. There's lots of planting space in the borders, and the edges are easy to maintain.



Scale: 1 square = 25 square ft.

# design your dream garden: part 2 – define the shapes (continued)

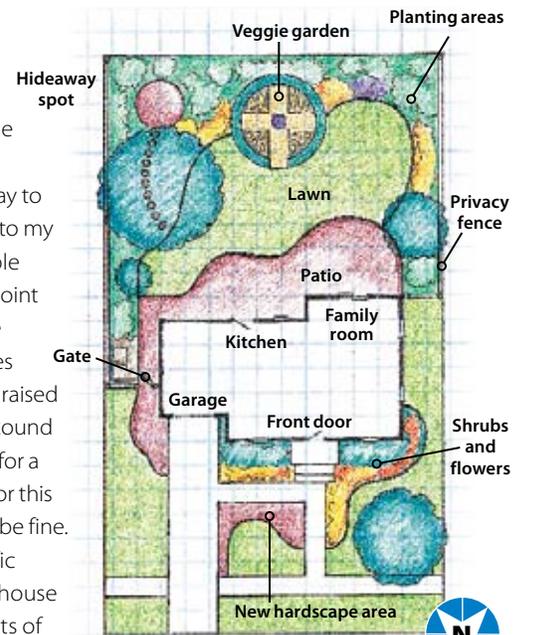
Once I've made sketches, I usually find that I like elements from several of them. So I'll work them into my final designs. That's just what I've done here. I've adjusted the shapes and sizes to create two designs — one with curving lines here and one with mostly straight lines and sharp angles on page 4. For now, both of them are contenders. But in our next installment I'll choose one and complete the plan, selecting hardscaping and plants. I'll also include a detailed plan of the hideaway area. It'll be helpful whether you're starting from scratch or updating your existing yard. □

— Jim Childs

**Curved lines** I liked the circles you saw on one of my early sketches, so I found a way to integrate a couple of them into my final plan. The round vegetable garden will be a good focal point when viewed from the house and patio. I'll plant it in wedges separated by paths and put a raised bed of flowers in the center. Round may not be a practical shape for a large vegetable garden, but for this 20-ft.-diameter spot it would be fine.

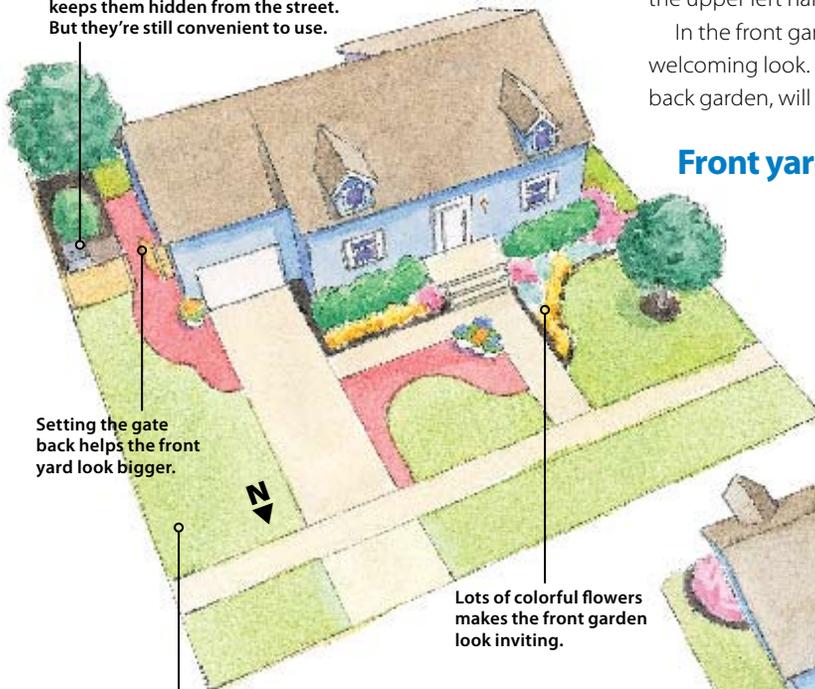
This patio design lets traffic move across the back of the house efficiently, too. And there's lots of space for plantings in the borders around the back yard. There's even enough depth to the bed in the upper left hand corner to make the hideaway feel really secluded.

In the front garden, flowing curves widen the sidewalk and add a welcoming look. Plus, all of these gently curving edges, in the front and back garden, will be easy to mow without going back to trim.



Scale: 1 square = 25 square ft.

Tucking tool storage, compost and potting bench behind this fence keeps them hidden from the street. But they're still convenient to use.



Setting the gate back helps the front yard look bigger.

Lots of colorful flowers makes the front garden look inviting.

No fence or plantings here, just let the lawn blend into the neighbor's lawn. It'll make the front yard seem bigger and make the neighborhood look friendlier.

## Front yard view

The generous size of the patio ties the kitchen and family room areas together.

This circular hideaway is 10 ft. in diameter, a good size for two chairs and a small table.

## Back yard view

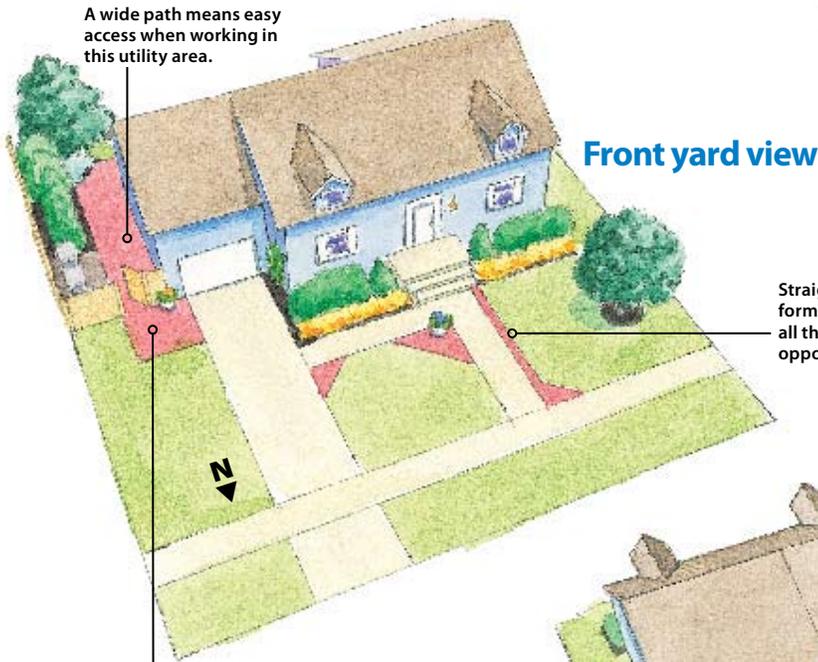
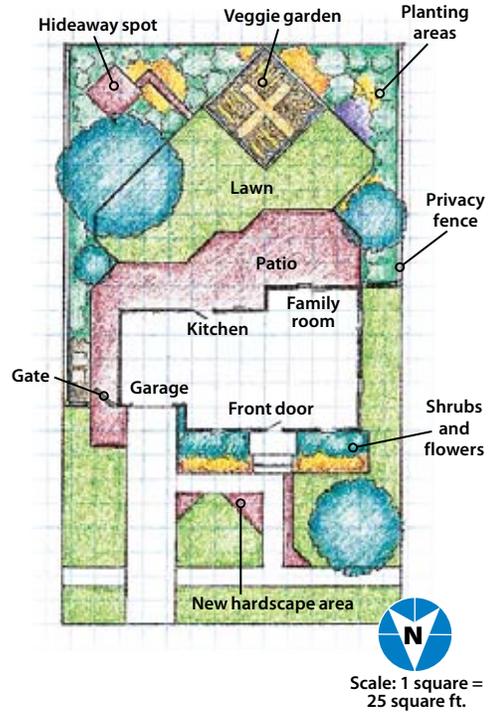
This ornamental tree casts some shade on the southwest corner of the patio, blocks the view of the neighbor's trash cans and provides privacy for the patio from the second story of the house next door.

Keep this south side of the yard open with no privacy fence or large hedge. This offers an unobstructed view of the open space beyond from the house and patio.

A formal veggie garden? Divide the beds with paths for easy access into each section.

**Straight lines** The generous sizes of the borders in this layout are perfect for plenty of shrubs and flowers. And see the large patio across the back of the house? Not only will it offer lots of space for entertaining, but it's efficient. Notice how it connects both doors on the back of the house? That means serving a meal will be easy. Plus, the patio ties into the path that leads around the house to the front yard so guests won't have to go through the house to get to the back yard.

Adding just a small bit of hard surface around the existing sidewalk is an easy way to give your entry a unique look and distinguish it from similar homes on the street. Plus, it's less expensive than taking out all of the concrete. Not only is the look unique, the wider sidewalk helps make the front yard feel more spacious and welcoming, too. These hard surface areas in the angles of the sidewalk give visitors more areas where they can stand and chat. And they provide spots for a few containers to change the look of the entrance without a lot of work.



A wide path means easy access when working in this utility area.

**Front yard view**

Straight lines and simple plantings add a formal look to this small house. Plus with all the gardens in the back yard, here is an opportunity to keep maintenance easier.

One continuous surface makes it easy to roll a wheelbarrow or other equipment from the utility area.

Medium-sized shrubs and lots of perennials soften the view into the hideaway but won't block air circulation.

There's plenty of room to dress up this landing with one (or several) colorful, flower-filled containers.

**Back yard view**

It won't take much time to mow both the front and back lawns, but there's still room to play games or let pets run.

Leave the south side of the yard unfenced and without a large hedge so folks on the deck or patio can easily see the nice view beyond the yard.

A fence around the garden will protect the vegetables from critters. But adding two gates means easy access for working.