

# HIDDEN DEPTHS

Skilful design and woodland planting have transformed this tiny front garden into a secluded leafy hideaway



**DESIGNER PROFILE** A former international lobbyist, Sue Townsend MSGD retrained as a garden designer after starting a family. In 2004, she set up her Suffolk-based studio, creating designs for urban and country gardens. She has won two Society of Garden Designer Awards.

## Can you tell us about the design brief?

The garden wraps around two sides of a three-storey townhouse, with no other green space, and faces residential streets, with tall houses opposite. The existing garden provided no privacy and was very narrow and quite dark. The owners asked me to design a verdant space that they could sit in and that neighbours and passers-by could not see. They also wanted year-round planting interest and a palette including blue, pink, purple and lime green.

## What challenges did you face?

The design was largely determined by the plot size and shape, and working around two mature lime trees and a deep light well which, for safety reasons, has to be fenced off. When I first visited, work was being done to the house and the garden was covered with building materials; my first task, therefore, was to aerate the compacted soil so that the trees and plants could continue to grow healthily.

## How did your design solve these problems?

Victorian-style railings, painted blue to match the house, were installed above the light well, and I used a tall hedge of pleached hornbeam as a slim yet textured screen to shield the garden from the road. Hornbeam is tough and, although we installed an irrigation system to help the hedge become established, it can cope with a restricted water supply. The path has a sinuous shape so it takes that bit longer to journey through the garden, making the plot look and feel larger. I put seating areas at both ends of the path, in response to the angle of the sun. The breakfast area is set on a raised stone terrace outside the kitchen; at the other end, there is a larger, round terrace with a dining table for lunch and evening meals. The planting is in raised beds edged with Corten steel, which gives a contemporary look while still complementing the façade of the period house.

## What inspired your planting choices?

The garden faces north; it gets just a little sun in the morning and late afternoon, so the plants have to cope with shade. The mature trees also suck out moisture, which is why I used raised beds. A few spring bulbs add early season colour, and a Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood', adds a dramatic focal point next to the house.

## How did you create the pleached hedge?

Pleaching means training the tree stems horizontally so that they form a wide, narrow framework. To create this shape, it is easiest



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to use plants that have already been trained onto canes or wires. You can buy these from specialist hedge suppliers, then simply plant them close together to form a screen. Here, I have installed horizontal wires on posts across the length of the boundary and the hornbeam stems are tied in to these as they grow. Eventually they will also need to be pruned in winter to maintain the shape.

## Do you have any design tips for narrow town gardens?

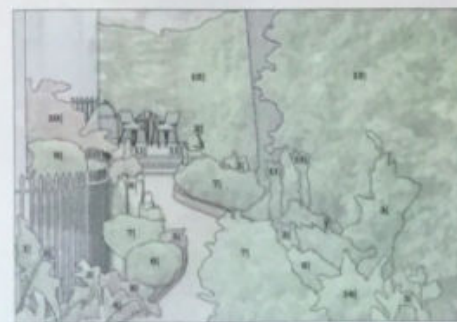
Although it seems counterintuitive, the more planting you use, the larger the garden feels. The owners were amazed by how

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WITH PHOTOGRAPHER BARBARANE MARSHALL



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much I packed in next to the house and in front of the hedge, but doing this has created the impression of being surrounded by an expanse of woodland, rather than hemmed in by roads. It is also challenging to work with a shallow garden, such as this one, where the windows are close to the boundary. However, using a combination of textured and seasonal planting will make the outlook interesting. The hornbeam foliage, for example, will turn bronze over winter until new green leaves emerge in spring. Using planting with lots of detail also draws the eye into the garden, rather than out towards the boundary and beyond.



## KEY PLANTS

- 1] Clematis 'Alba Luxurians'
- 2] Tulipa 'Queen of the Night'
- 3] Digitalis purpurea f. albiflora (white foxglove)
- 4] Allium hollandicum 'Purple Sensation' (in bud)
- 5] Heuchera 'Plum Pudding'
- 6] Busulf sempervirens (box)
- 7] Euphorbia amygdaloides var. robbiae (wood spurge)
- 8] Tulipa 'White Triumphator'
- 9] Akebia quinata (chocolate vine)
- 10] Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood'
- 11] Aquilegia vulgaris var. stellata 'Black Barlow'
- 12] Carpinus betulus (hornbeam hedge)
- 13] Aquilegia vulgaris var. stellata 'Blue Barlow'
- 14] Dryopteris affinis 'Cristata' (maie fern)

## PLANT SUPPLIERS

- The Beth Chatto Gardens**, 01206 822007, [bethchatto.co.uk](http://bethchatto.co.uk)  
**Burncoose Nurseries**, 01209 860316, [burncoose.co.uk](http://burncoose.co.uk)  
**The Walled Garden**, 01728 602510, [thewalledgarden.co.uk](http://thewalledgarden.co.uk)  
**Wootens of Wenhaston**, 01502 478258, [wootensplants.com](http://wootensplants.com)

## LANDSCAPE SUPPLIERS

The path is laid with Thames buff gravel and the terrace is reclaimed Yorkstone, both from CED, 01708 867237, [ced.ltd.uk](http://ced.ltd.uk). The metal railings and Corten edging are from Archimet, 01622 850737, [archimetdesigns.co.uk](http://archimetdesigns.co.uk).

## GARDEN DESIGN

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