

# Create the ultimate relaxing corner

## Design an area filled with calming plants and features

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We're entering the busiest time in the gardening calendar. Grass is growing again, everywhere needs a tidy and seedlings are rapidly outgrowing their quarters and need potting on. With an already full to-do list, who needs another project? But trust me! This one will help you enjoy all your other endeavours that bit more. It's about making a space outdoors for you and your loved ones to simply stop and 'be' for a few precious moments.

There's increasing evidence to prove what most of us instinctively feel - that being outdoors in the fresh air is good for our mental health and well-being. Physical gardening tasks that need our total attention, but at the same time have a repetitive rhythm to them, are a form of meditation in themselves. And, of course, the bodily exercise is good for us.

But we can become addicted to the 'busyness' and stressed by the desire for perfection. Sometimes we need to stop, notice our breathing and appreciate fully the present moment. Being mindful for a short while will help us return to the tasks of the day refreshed and grateful.

## Find your perfect spot

Aim for the feel of the outdoor 'den' many of us had as children. An element of enclosure is needed. It may help to identify the time of day that you're most likely to be seeking sanctuary. Will it be first thing in the morning? Or in the evening? If you work from home maybe mid-morning or lunchtime are times when you seek a few moments of reflection with a cuppa. Take a folding chair around the garden and try sitting in different spots to identify where feels right. If possible it needs to be away from where you sit to be sociable; somewhere a bit tucked away. It could be nestled by a hedge or within a flower border.

When you're happy with the location of your 'quiet area', find or make some form of more permanent seating and adjust or make plans for the screening. In a new garden you may need to invest in some trellis, living willow or a bought arbour seat. In an overgrown garden you could prune out a hollow from existing shrubs or remove some lower limbs from a tree. A safe haven with a view out is the ideal!

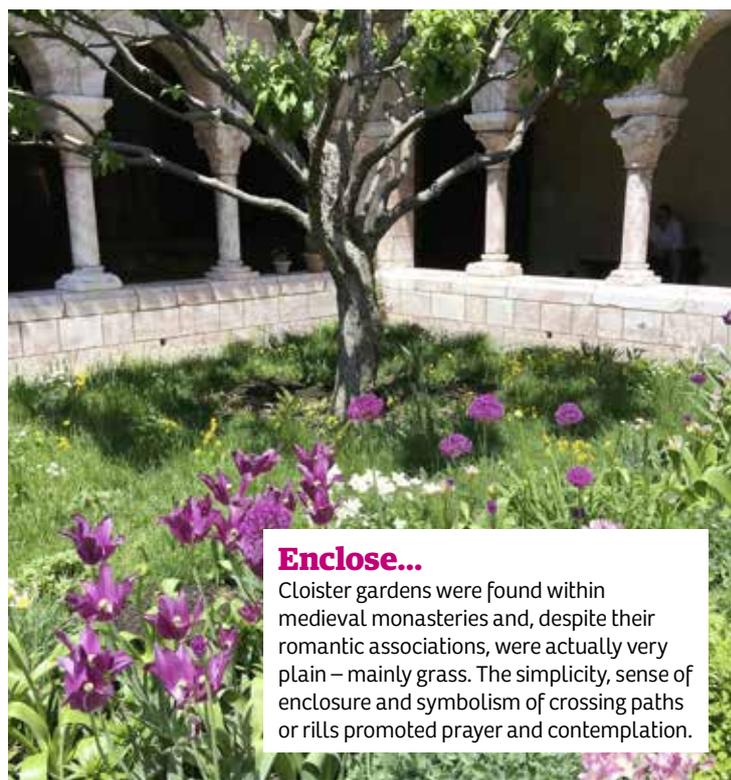


## No prima donna plants!

The plants in your cosy corner need to be low maintenance. You don't want to be itching to fetch a watering can or compelled to start deadheading! The planting scheme needs to be simple. This isn't an area to display your credentials as a plantsperson, with a complex collection of different varieties. In fact, what might work is a monoculture of one tall perennial that gradually conceals you as the season progresses, or a year-round curtain of bamboo.



## An oasis of calm



Feel happier and calmer by creating your own private oasis



### Add water...

An Islamic paradise garden is geometric and based around a central square or rectangular pool. The sound of running water is important, as are fruit trees – almonds, mulberries and figs, for instance.



### Keep it simple...

Zen gardens in Japan are also enclosed and pared down to a few key elements. Raked gravel or sand represent water in which rocks form islands. A lone pine, ginkgo or a few patches of moss may be permitted but no flowers.

## A sensory retreat

A mindfulness space needs a balance of simplicity and sensual delight. Whether one type of plant is used or a small range, choose with the five senses in mind. A bamboo screen is a visual delight, filtering the sun's rays in endlessly changing patterns. It also rustles in the breeze and just asks to be stroked. In a shady corner ferns and hostas have similarly tactile foliage. Climbers can help surround you and many, like honeysuckle, jasmine or climbing roses, have scented flowers. Using plants endorsed by the RHS as 'perfect for pollinators' will usher in butterflies and a host of fascinating insects that help us focus outside ourselves. A bird enjoying a bath can be a similarly joyful diversion so you may want to include a shallow container of water. It needs to be a space personal to you. Most people find pastel colours relaxing, but if you fancy being 'lost' in a mini-field of sunflowers or the brightest dahlias then just go for it!

Surround yourself with rose scent!



Watching birds is a simple pleasure

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# Five senses, five plants

## Sight

Studying the intricate structure of a passion flower can be a meditation in itself. *Passiflora* 'Snow Queen' is a vigorous, hardy and utterly beautiful new white variety.



## Smell

*Nemesia* 'Wisley Vanilla' is a bedding plant with the most intoxicating, summery fragrance that can only lift your mood. The flowers are delicate and pretty, white with a lemon eye, and keep on coming.



## Sound

On a hot, dry day in summer the popping sound of *Euphorbia characias wulfenii* is mesmerising. It's made by the seed pods exploding. The perennial has year-round structure and is tall enough to enclose without being thuggish.



## Taste

Add a bit of mindful 'blackberrying' to your down time by planting an early and a late-fruiting variety, blackberry 'Loch Ness' and 'Navaho', for instance.



## CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Be strict with yourself and set aside a different time in the week to see to any actual gardening in your secret spot. Keep furniture clean and component plants within their bounds to leave you space when you need it for quiet time. Similarly, give new plantings a good soaking once a week during dry spells so you can surround yourself with perky plants. Do your homework when designing the area and adopt the 'right plant, right place' approach. That way the plants will thrive and radiate peace.



Always water new plantings regularly

## Touch

*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' is a deciduous, perennial grass that forms a well-behaved mound and sends up long-lasting, pinkish, fluffy bottlebrush blooms that demand to be caressed.

