

tight spots



I have only a small amount of space for a garden. Can you give me some suggestions as to what I should plant in a narrow rectangular area that runs alongside my back patio?



Text by Troy Bankord • Illustration by Clint Miller

Plants with height, movement and texture make a narrow garden interesting. Layering keeps the space from appearing simple, ordinary and lackluster. Use symmetry to create a sense of sophistication, and asymmetry to evoke an organic or artistic feeling. Following are specific ideas for planting a narrow area.

- In a formal setting, a low hedge of dwarf myrtle, boxleaf euonymus or rosemary provides a beautiful backdrop for a mass of liriope, mondo grass, geraniums, germander, daylilies, 'Katie' ruellia, zephyranthes (rain or zephyr lilies) or wand flower.

- A more natural "hedge" can be created along the back of the bed with heavenly bamboo, rosemary, *Agave gemniflora*, bat-faced cuphea, and slipper plant. Foreground plantings might include various species of verbena, lantana, gaura, Angelita daisies, blackfoot daisies, germander, 'Katie' ruellia, rain lilies or Mexican evening primrose. Annuals such as pansies, johnny jump-ups, lobelias and alyssum could be added as a simple low border during cooler months.

- Narrow boulders with some height can provide a sense of drama and balance.

- Staggering plants lends a softer, more natural feel to the space. Placing larger plants in a zigzag fashion along the back will create small pockets in the front and help soften the rectangular lines of the planting bed.

- If your garden has a cleaner, more contemporary feel, try planting the space with one plant

species (or two at the most). Mass iris varieties (such as African or bicolor), slipper plant, gray desert milkweed or candlelilla (*Euphorbia antisyphilitica*).

- Create a sense of movement by covering the soil surface with decomposed granite and laying a meandering "river bed" of black pebbles through the space.

- Depending on how wide and long the planting area is, pots can be set in the back or center of the bed, appearing to rise out of a "blanket" of foliage. You might try artemisia 'Powis Castle', creeping or woolly thyme, dusty miller or santolina if you like gray foliage. If you prefer foliage that is green, try germander, 'Katie' ruellia, purple lantana, wedelia, or trailing ruellia. Agave, iris or pencil euphorbia in pots with underlying stones provide drama. Filling pots with a mass of annuals such as pansies, lobelias, portulacas or even petunias lends a less structured appearance. Depending on the shape of the pots, a single dwarf olive bush set in the center and clipped in a round shape is an interesting touch.

Even the tightest spots in the garden will come to life with the addition of carefully chosen plants. Don't forget to add personality with colorful pots, artwork or salvaged artifacts. 🌿

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