



# inner sanctum

I have a central courtyard that is visible from the entry, dining room and living area of my home. Can you offer some ideas for plants and other items that would give it zip and character?



Text by Troy Bankord • Illustration by Clint Miller

Courtyards are an extension of the home and should be planned with the same care as your interiors. The keys to transforming a run-of-the-mill courtyard into an incredible garden are height, texture and movement.

Try painting walls a bold color such as black, chocolate brown or geranium red to provide an incredible backdrop for flowering or lush green plants. A more subtle look can be achieved with such earth tones as sage green, taupe or putty. To create continuity, repeat a color from your dining room, living room or entry. Here are more ideas:

- Consider covering a wall with brick tiles, travertine, stacked stone or slate. Before doing so, be certain that the wall can support the additional weight.
- Choose tall plants or small trees that can be maintained easily in smaller spaces. Plants to try include *Ficus benjamina* or *F. allii*, bird of paradise, bamboo palm, *Acacia pendula*, *A. willardiana*, pygmy date palm or pencil euphorbia.
- Layer plants with differing heights and textures to bring interest to the space. In tight, angular spots it is important to incorporate soft plants with height, such as sago palm, glossy abelia, *Ruellia brittoniana*, *Yucca pendula*, dwarf olive, pentas, asparagus or foxtail fern, assorted grasses, daylily, Mexican honeysuckle, nolina, nandina, octopus agave, *Agave desmettiana* or wedelia.

• Avoid “blanketing” the courtyard floor with ground cover. Negative space between plantings brings a cleaner, larger and more serene feeling to the space. To create interest, try berming the soil with soft hills or incorporating a small meandering riverbed of rock for added movement.

• Anchor a water feature or piece of sculpture to the back wall, or place as if rising from the ground to add drama. For a Zen feel, try yaupon holly or olive bonsais planted off-center along with a small grouping of boulders and some small tight grasses.

• Try elevating a row of pots on pedestals and filling them with the same plant material for a clean and sophisticated look.

• Use up-lights on plants to create shadows and a romantic ambience.

• Attach decorative iron pieces or wood trellises on a wall to provide dimension.

• Install thick, staggered slabs of wood or stone against the wall to display interesting artifacts, pottery or art glass.

A courtyard offers a unique opportunity to bring the beauty of the outdoors close to your home. Make the most of it with careful planning, diligent maintenance and a healthy dose of imagination. 🌿

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