



pretty patios

We have a small enclosed patio off our master bedroom, and another one off the master bath. Can you give me some ideas to make these areas pretty and interesting?



Text by Troy Bankord • Illustration by Clint Miller

By viewing the patio as an extension of the home, you can create continuity and movement of energy between interior and exterior spaces. If possible, replace windows with glass doors that will allow you to fully enjoy the outdoor area. Then, paint the patio walls in a color found in your bedroom or bathroom. Doing so brings the space inward. When choosing a color for exterior walls, keep in mind that darker shades create less glare and seem to “disappear” once the sun goes down. Following are more ideas for adding interest to your enclosed patio areas:

- Think of the window or door as a frame for your view. To compose a pleasing “picture” within that frame, attach any of the following to the patio wall for visual interest: iron garden gate, fountain, hand-painted tiles, pots, interesting branches from one of your trees, or architectural artifacts.
- If privacy is not an issue, hire a contractor to cut out a small section of a patio wall; this creates a “window” to the area beyond and visually extends the space.
- Brick “tiles” or stone can be adhered to the existing wall for added texture.
- Bird-feeders or a birdbath can be incorporated to provide visual interest and attract wildlife to your space.
- Boulders, soft berms and even a “stream bed”

of stones also can enhance these confined areas.

Vegetation plays an important role as well. Use plants with height to soften corners or frame a window. Try bamboo, heavenly bamboo, Mexican bird of paradise, loquat, palo blanco or Japanese black pine.

Specimen cacti such as Indian fig prickly pear, *cereus peruviana* or Mexican fencepost, or a spiral topiary of *Ilex* ‘Pride of Houston’ (a type of holly), can be used to bring a sculptural element to the space. Hardy choices include heavenly bamboo, pencil euphorbia, salvia varieties, *Yucca pendula*, *Myrtus boetica*, ruellia and small palms.

Don’t forget about lighting. Illuminating plant material is important, but also think about how the shadows of the plants play against walls. Experiment with the beam of a flashlight, moving it around to find the desired angle; then determine what type of light fixture is needed.

Finally, keep in mind that less is more in these walled-in areas. Choose your accessories carefully, and leave a little space between plants for a more pleasing, serene effect. 🌿

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