

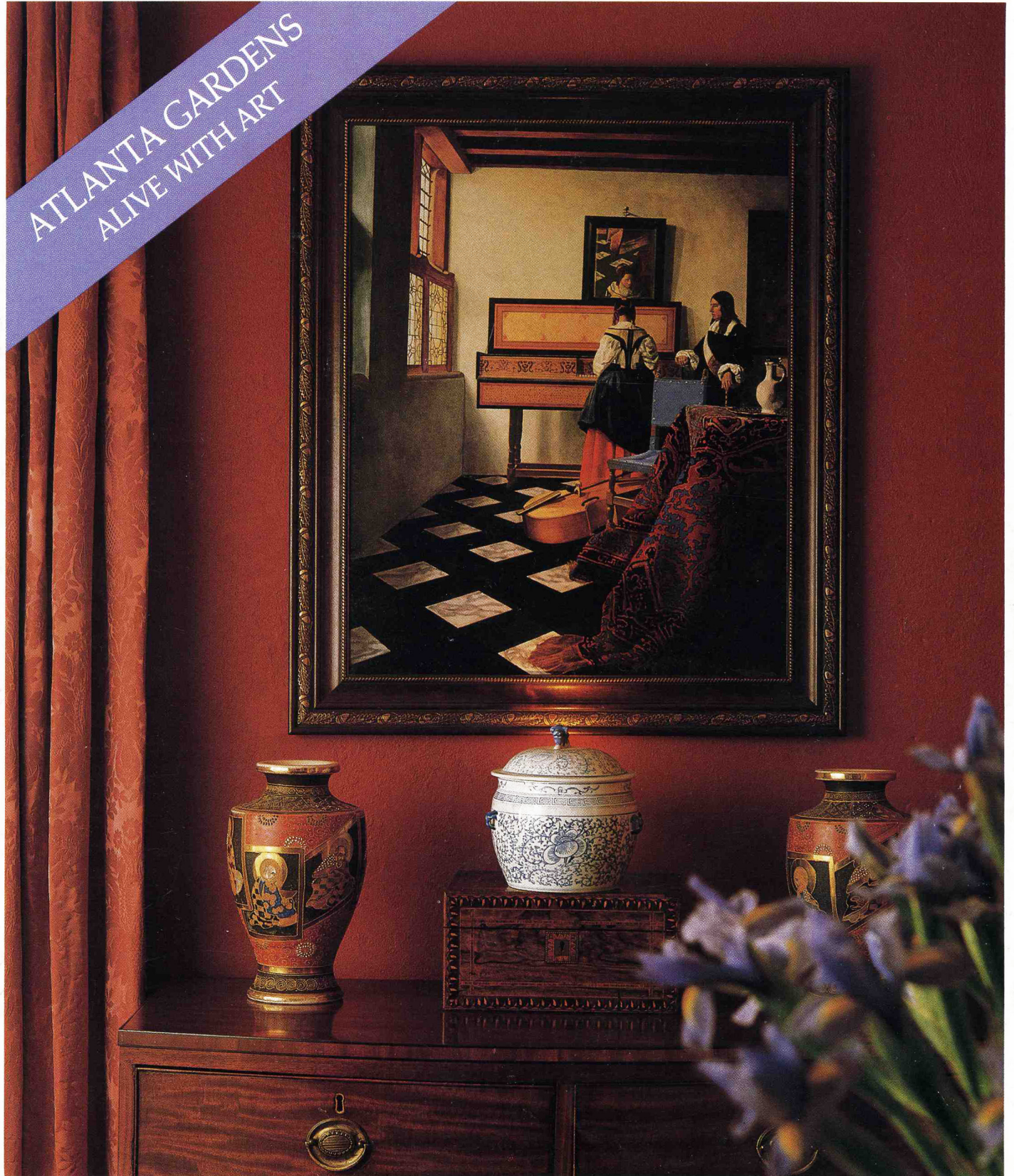
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ATLANTA GARDENS
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Small But Significant Pocket Gardens

By Judy Hotchkiss

Photography Courtesy of William T. Smith and Associates

A lot of people think you need a lot of space to have a fine garden. "It isn't so," says landscape designer William T. Smith, ASLA. As with decorating a small home, the requirements of small-space landscaping may be different from landscaping larger projects, but the results can be equally stunning.

Small-space gardening takes several forms—condominium courtyards, secluded side yards, small open spaces in an otherwise wooded lot and areas isolated by topography such as a small, flat yard at the base of a hill.

First, consider your personality and needs, suggests Sherry Doyal, a horticulturalist, landscape contractor and owner of Southernscapes in

Norcross. Is the pocket garden to be "a quiet haven, a place for solitude or a place for entertaining? Will you be home during the day to enjoy it or is yours a career family with only evenings and weekends at home?"

Next, examine the existing space. The degree of formality to be achieved in the garden is "dictated by the architecture of the house," explains Smith. "You have to marry the garden and the house's architecture."

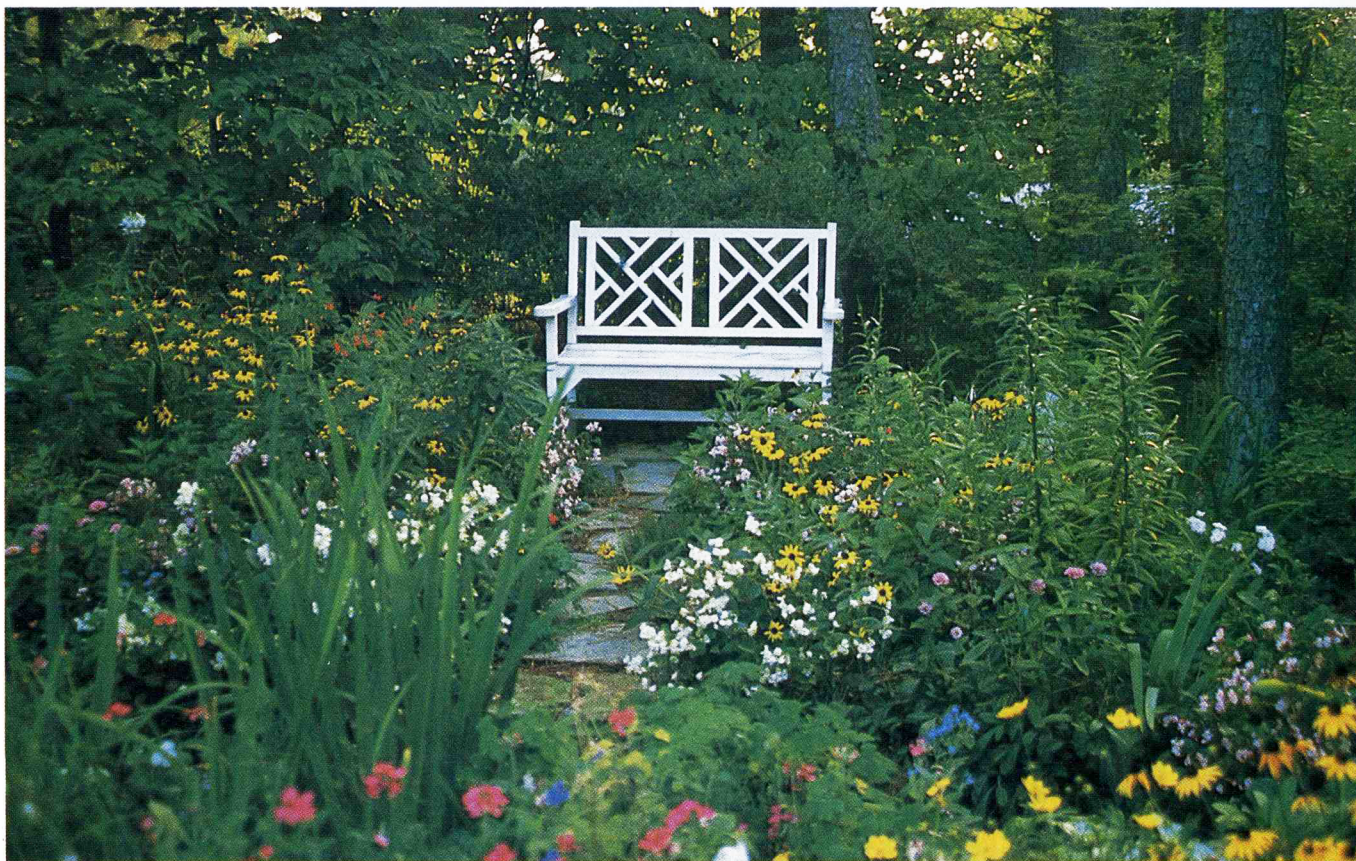
"Proportion is very important," says landscape designer Fred Thacker of Rosebud Landscape Gardeners. "The terrace should work off the house—its style, materials and obvious architectural points. You can't do a good garden design without thinking of all these things: the view

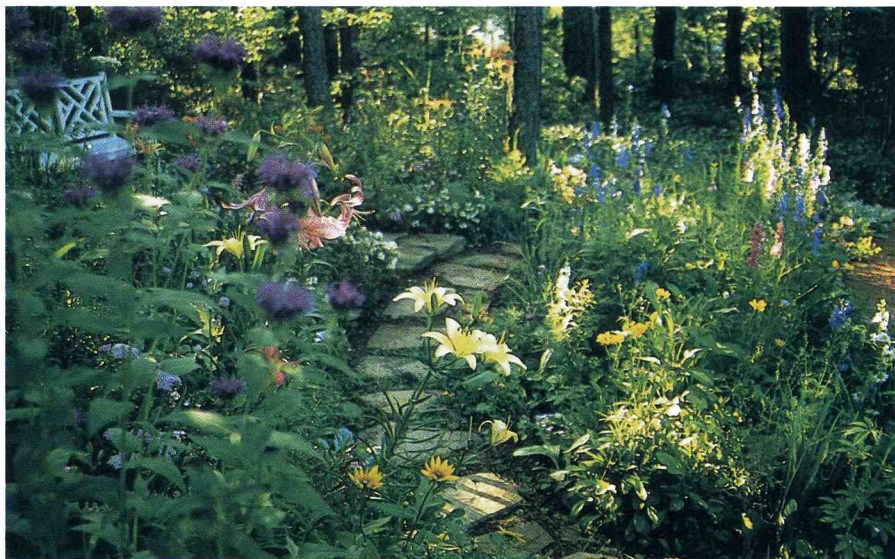
from the house, the sense of space (while in the garden) and what you feel when you are inside the house.

"Make the garden visible from the house so it draws you out to find yourself surrounded by the subtle effects, the textures and small fragrance," says Doyal. "You'll feel warm and secure there." The plants themselves can determine whether a garden is restful, she adds. There's

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For a small corner of a backyard, William T. Smith designed a colorful perennial garden. Care for the perennial garden involves only routine maintenance. The bench gives the garden a separateness as well as a focal point.





Most of the circulation of foot traffic in this yard is on the flagstone. Smith laid the rock directly into the dirt so that plants and mosses could grow between the stones for a softened look. The flagstone provides the essential access for routine maintenance of the garden.

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tranquility in simplicity. Suddenly details become very important. Unlike a garden viewed from afar, every element in a small space is near enough for scrutiny.

“It’s very important to create a focal point so the eye doesn’t wander or feel closed in. You can use a fountain, for example. It provides nice reflections and many nice effects,” says Doyal. A small water feature—

just a trickle—can bring a sense of tranquility and focus the entire garden on its source.

Focal points may include a fountain, specimen tree, small gazebo or arbor, flower bed or seating area. In addition to personal taste, keep in mind the garden’s most likely hours of use.

For busy career couples, night-scaping is the answer, says Doyal. Design the garden to be at its best during the evening. Doyal would select honeysuckle and white roses for their fragrance, stephanotis, tuber roses and white carnations. Enhance the plantings with uplighting, a moonlight fixture for overall illumination and small spotlights for accenting certain plants or areas.

As in any landscape, the plants must be suited to the soil, exposure and amount of sunlight available on the site. The biggest mistake you can make is copying the typical foundation plantings found around typical suburban homes. “They’re selected for size, spread and rapid growth—to save you and the builder money,”

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says Doyal. This isn't what you need in a small space.

Fred Thacker would plant his "English boxwood look" in a small garden. The greens are deep and compatible, and the plants tend to remain compact. These include helleri holly, a low-growing evergreen as background planting; a crepe myrtle for summer blossoms and its sculptural trunks in winter; nandina, particularly the dwarf variety, for its reddish stems, small white flowers in spring, red berries in winter and foliage all year round; and leather-leaved mahonia bealei with its grape-like berries and shaggy stems.

One of Bill Smith's favorites for a small or mid-size area is a herbaceous flower border. While it is often called a perennial garden, the bed usually contains spring flowering bulbs and some annuals to add color when the perennials wane. "You want as much color coming out of an area as possible. This mixture will carry you through the seasons," says Smith.

Use your favorite colors in your flower border. If it will be a cutting bed, consider your home's interior color scheme, too. Now select your site, typically in front of background shrubs or in front of a privacy wall.

The extensive use of groundcover and evergreen shrubs around this brick-lined flagstone walkway is complemented by Smith's use of white charm begonias in the large pots. Because of the artful combination, a once-narrow walkway is visually expanded.

Next, plan a different scheme for spring, summer and fall color. Smith draws the colors on transparent overlays so he can check for pleasing effects as one season slips gradually into the next. Plant heights and foliage textures should also be considered, he says.

Above all, he says, choose plants you like then distribute them through the flower border. Among his favorites are pink and white charm begonias, and medium and dwarf lilies (under three feet and never five to seven feet in a small garden.)

Six feet is about the right width, he says, if you have the space. Make weeding easy by adding stepping stones in a gently curving path through the middle, perhaps leading to an inviting piece of yard furniture. A three- or four-foot-wide bed is possible, but anything much narrower will seem skimpy. Consider containers, he says. "In all cases, let

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your eye tell you things. That's the nicest thing about gardening: You can always change things."

For small spaces, Japanese maples make fine specimen trees. Try blood-good, with burgundy leaves, or lace-leaf, "one of the prettiest small trees," says Thacker.

Add perennials (gerbera daisies, iris, daylilies, for example) and a few annuals in containers. Impatiens, salvia and begonias are favored by these designers. Wildflowers in pots can be conveniently hidden or removed when they are past their mid-summer prime.

Container-grown plants are ideal for small spaces. They can be quickly planted with seasonal color and easily changed when the plants decline. In summer the pots can be planted with white charm begonias. In winter tulips are overplanted with calendulas or pansies for later winter and spring color.

Pots, both terra-cotta and colored concrete, are often used by designers. Since freezing/thawing moisture during winter damages terra-cotta, it must be stored indoors. Concrete requires no special treatment and is less expensive. Both come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Use a few large pots—rather than many small ones—since large containers lose moisture more slowly and require less watering during hot periods. If you don't have time to water container plants, don't have them, advises Smith.

Watering your new plants for the first two years is a must, says Thacker. While it isn't cost effective to install an irrigation system in a very small garden, says Doyal, she suggests poking holes in a hose to create a drip irrigation system. Thacker helps his clients set up a sprinkler sized and sited for the space. Add a timer that turns off the sprinkler when the desired amount of water has been distributed, pull a few weeds now and then, and you will have a nearly carefree garden in your small space. ♦

Judy Hotchkiss is an Atlanta-based free-lance writer. Her articles have appeared in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta magazine and Creative Loafing.