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Go for it in the GARDEN



Gardening Goddess,
Pat Fox, plots a New Year plan for enhancing life outdoors.



Left: A small circular patio adds a beautiful design feature. Above: You can take furniture with you when you move.



Q

Should I be planning projects or simply buying products to enhance my garden?
Jan Tuck, 64, Harlow



Q

What should I concentrate on doing in the garden to add value to my home?
Laura Dolby, 49, Dane End

The most important question to answer when investing time and money in your garden is 'How long are we going to live here?' We ask our clients the very same one before commencing any design work. If, for example, you hope to move on in two years, you should focus your efforts on items which could be taken with you, such as a beautiful multi-stem Betula (Silver Birch) in a large stainless steel/wooden planter, which would enhance virtually any garden. Not only do items such as these bring personal enjoyment, they add real value to the ambience of your garden when it comes to selling your property. Then, you can choose whether to take it with you to your next home, or negotiate a price with your purchasers for you to leave it in situ.

Investing in an outdoor dining table is another wise move as it will make an instant difference to any garden. There's a wide range of styles available, and you really can't beat the latest outdoor wicker furniture that looks stylish and can be left outside, uncovered all year round. No more unsightly green plastic covers!

If, however, you plan to stay for around five years or more, I would recommend introducing a decent patio. A patio in a garden is rather like a kitchen in a house; make it a good one and it will undoubtedly increase the value of your property. A lot of new houses are built and laid immediately with what I call 'grotty utility paving'; it does the job

but looks pretty awful. Decide what size patio you need: is your current space big enough? Is it in the right position? Does it get enough sun? If you're unsure then I would suggest you call in a garden designer for a consultation.

Most designers will charge a nominal fee and will give you ample advice about size, location, and materials. You can then take this info and DIY or use them to design an outline plan for you, and find you a reputable contractor to carry out the work. A very basic stone patio built from scratch by a reputable contractor will set you back anything from £100 - £200 per square metre. If you want to do it yourself, you can source some lovely sandstones from around £20 per square metre (just for the stone), but add on material costs for the sub-base and mortar etc - and your own hard graft! Alternatively, execute the patio in a deck material. I'm a strong advocate of hardwood; it is more expensive, but

it's worth it. In five years a hardwood deck will have aged beautifully and will look good for 15 - 20 years. A softwood deck will look poor, and will be in need of major refurbishment or replacement sooner rather than later. Labour cost to install both - exactly the same!

In a nutshell, consider transient or moveable items if you plan to stay for the short term, and more permanent features if you will be there for the long haul. This way you will definitely recover any investments that you make in your garden... and you get to enjoy them along the way.

Pat Fox set up Aralia Garden Design five years ago and has won a Silver Floral Award at Chelsea Flower Show 2009 and The Landscape Design Excellence Award from BALI (British Association Landscape Industries). You can contact Pat via www.aralia.org.uk, 01279 730 040, info@aralia.org.uk

