

A photograph of a modern outdoor patio. In the foreground, a large, rusted metal fire pit sits on a light-colored stone patio, containing several logs. Behind it, a wooden bench is visible. In the background, a dining table with wicker chairs is set under a pergola with a slatted roof. The patio is bordered by a brick wall and lush greenery.

# From a Design Point of View

---

**Design with purpose**

**Build with style**

**Obtain the dream**

**Scott Bartho**



# Table Of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Define the Dream	3
3. Get to Know your Site	5
4. Garden Zoning	7
5. The Flow of the Garden	9
6. Structure First, Pretty Later	11
7. Plan your Planting	12
8. Final Thoughts	14

19

20

01

# Introduction

Designing a garden might seem like it's all plant shopping and Pinterest scrolling but trust me—it takes more than a few potted Camellia's and a vague idea of “somewhere to sit,” to design a stunning, functional space that your family will enjoy and remember. Great gardens are designed. Thoughtfully. Purposefully. With absolute intention.

It starts with a vision or at least a list of likes and don't likes (plus a coffee, and possibly wine).

It can take some time to fully understand your space, the way the sun moves across your back garden or areas most exposed to windy conditions.

Whether you're starting with a blank slate or revamping your existing garden of good intentions, this guide walks you through the first essential steps to getting the outdoor space you actually want and need for your lifestyle.

Ready to create something beautiful? Let's dig in.



## 02

# Define the Dream

Start by asking yourself a deceptively simple question: What do I want from my outdoor space?

It's a simple question which many homeowners often struggle to answer or articulate clearly. Take some time to really reflect on it (this is where the wine comes in) and obtain a thorough understanding of what you need from your outdoor space.

Start by building a digital or physical mood board. Pull images from Pinterest, landscape design books, travel snaps, or even your favourite magazines.

Think about what you're naturally drawn to. Is it the clean lines of a modern contemporary garden? The layered romance of a rambling cottage garden? Or maybe a Mediterranean courtyard with terracotta pots and cobblestones? Try and identify a theme, or parts of a theme!

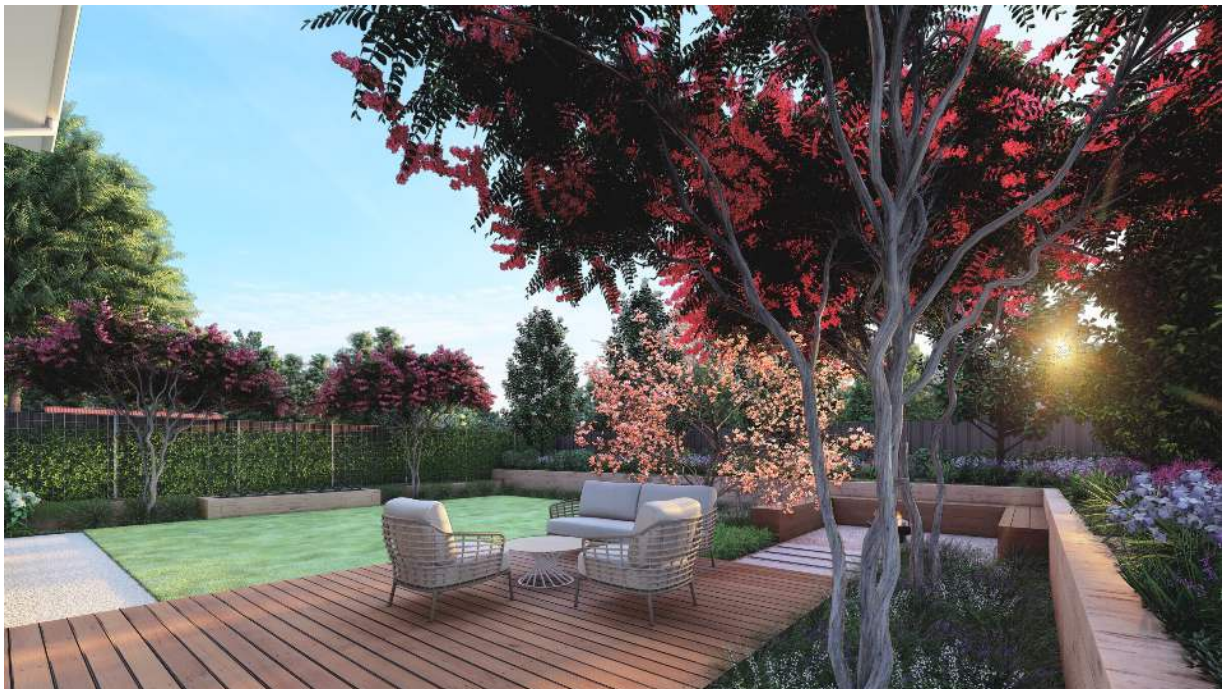


Break your list down further, including individual items that you want in your garden such as a spa or pool, an entertainment space with outdoor kitchen, a pergola, a kids' paradise with basketball court, a firepit or a little bit of everything? Your answers will help shape every decision that follows.

### **Consider the following:**

- How you want to feel in the space (Relaxed? Inspired? Entertained?)
- Who will use it—and how often?
- What don't you like about your garden? (goodbye patchy grass)
- Do you want colour in the garden? Flowers or texture, or both?
- What materials do you like, timber or composite decking? Sleeper or rendered walls?
- If your installing a swimming pool, do you want an outdoor shower? Pizza oven? Veggie patch? Space for the kids to run wild?

Don't worry about how it will all fit together yet. That's coming. Right now, just fall in love with the possibilities.





03

# Get to Know Your Site

No matter how Pinterest-worthy your vision is, your actual site has a few things to say about what will and won't work — and ignoring them is like trying to wear stilettos on a hiking trail. Painful and unwise.

Spend time outside in your garden at different times of day. Notice where the sun rises and sets. Where the wind sneaks through. Where your dog insists on digging despite your desperate pleas.

Every site has quirks, microclimates, and secret gifts, understanding them is the cornerstone of a truly successful landscape design.



Consider things like:

- **Sun and shade:** Track sunlight through the day. North-facing areas (in the Southern Hemisphere) get the most sun.
- **Soil type:** Grab a handful, give it a squeeze. Is it sandy? Clay-heavy? Crumbly loam? You can test it or just get your hands dirty.
- **Drainage:** Do puddles form after rain? Are there slopes or runoff points?
- **Wind:** Is there a prevailing breeze that could dry out plants or make sitting outside uncomfortable?
- **Views and eyesores:** Which direction offers a lovely vista — and which shows the neighbour's bins?

The goal isn't perfection, it's to work with your site not against it.





## 04

# Garden Zoning

Now let's get personal, its time to put pencil to paper or fire up the design program. How will you and your household actually use the space? What will fit within your space and what won't? This section is about lifestyle and practicality, not just aesthetics.

Zoning in landscape design is like having a good floor plan. Just like rooms in a house serve different functions, your garden should also have clearly designed zones that suit your lifestyle.

When your garden is thoughtfully planned it becomes easier to use maintain and a whole lot more enjoyable.

**Chapter 3 Get to Know Your Site** becomes relevant here, as your site might tell you where certain zones should be. A sunny sheltered corner might scream breakfast nook.





Try to create zones within the garden, connecting these zones with pathways.

### **Common Garden Zones:**

- Outdoor dining/entertaining area (where the wine flows and the BBQ sizzles)
- Lounge space (maybe with firepit or comfy seating)
- Children's play zone or open lawn
- Kitchen garden or fruit trees
- Quiet corner for reading or reflection (and a guilt free nap)
- Utility space for bins, clothesline and composting (not sexy but necessary)

Put your tape measure to work. You don't need to be a draftsman, just accurate enough to see what zones will fit in your garden.

### **Draw things like:**

- Property boundaries, buildings and existing features
- Slopes and levels (gravity is very real)
- Views you love, and those you'd rather block

Draw a simple base plan. Plain paper or a simple design program will do nicely.



## 05

# The Flow of the Garden

Let's talk garden choreography or flow. That may sound dramatic but trust me; how you move through a space defines how it feels. Great flow turns your garden into a seamless extension of your home.

Think about your garden zones (that you have now drawn) as a series of rooms. How do you get from one to another? What are the “desired traffic lines”, those natural paths people already walk? Where do you pause, sit, or linger?

Once you have your zones mapped out the next step is to connect these spaces using pathways such as paving, concrete or gravel.





How to create good flow through the garden:

- **Main access routes:** These are your high-traffic paths. Use durable, attractive materials like natural stone pavers; bluestone or granite.
- **Secondary pathways:** Think narrower, softer paths that invite exploration. Gravel, mulch or stepping stones can work beautifully.
- **Level changes:** Use decks, steps, or retaining walls to manage slopes and connect zones.
- **Focal Points:** Use water features, arches, or feature trees placement to create “aha” moments as you move. A focal point may draw you from one into another.

A garden with good flow feels natural and intuitive, almost like it’s guiding you. And that’s the magic!



## 06

# Structure First, Pretty Later

Now we're into the nitty-gritty. It's time to structure your space like a professional because a garden without structure is like a house without walls. Lovely to look at, but hard to live in.

Start with hardscape; the built elements like paving, decking, retaining walls and pergolas. This is what we call "the bones of the garden". These garden elements are usually fixed and essential, so starting with these elements is a great place to begin.

Get the hard elements right (such as the pool location or size of the deck) and what remains will be garden. Balance is key.

Resist the urge to start with plants! Build the framework first, and your garden will thank you in 10 years.





## 07

# Plan your Planting

This is where the fun really starts. But resist the urge to impulse-buy every blooming thing in sight.

### Start with structure:

- Trees and large shrubs; Your vertical anchors, screening plants and focal points.
- Medium shrubs and perennial; Add bulk, colour, and seasonal interest.
- Groundcovers and low plants; Soften edges and suppress weeds.

### Then:

- Use contrast and texture to add depth.
- Mix textures and foliage.
- Choose a consistent colour palette.
- Think about seasonal change, evergreen and deciduous; aim for year-round interest.
- Stick to a plant palette that works with local soil and climate.

**Insider tip:** Odd numbers look natural (plant in three's or five's).

Symmetry is satisfying but, there is also magic in asymmetry!



### Planting Design Principles to Follow:

- **Use repetition for rhythm:** repeated plants, materials, or shapes unify the space. Don't plant one plant, plant on mass for visual effect!
- **Create a hierarchy:** Work out what's dominant in the space, what's secondary and prioritise.
- **Focal points:** a tree, sculpture, or water feature gives the eye somewhere to land.
- **Plant Function:** how does each plant serve a purpose? If it doesn't serve a purpose such as a screening plant, climber or anchor plant, then why is it included in the plant scheme? Is it needed? Sometimes less is more!

Even the best design can't compensate for poor maintenance during the early stage of a new garden. Think of it as a settling in period. With the right amount of attention, fertilisation and water your garden will reward you for years to come.





## 08

# Final Thoughts

Designing your dream garden isn't just about plants, pavers, or perfect lighting. It's about creating an entire space that reflects who you are, supports how you live, and grows with you over time; both literally and metaphorically (yes, I went philosophical there for a second there). By following these foundational steps, from inspiration and analysis, to structure, style, and soul, you've laid the groundwork for a garden that doesn't just look good, but feels right. One that invites you out in the morning with your coffee, and holds space for wine and friends by firelight.

But of course, even dream gardens don't design or construct themselves, that's where we come in.

I'm Scott Bartho, the author of this E-book and the founding Director of Shape and Form, a landscape design and construction company established in 2005.

At Shape and Form, we live and breathe great garden design. We combine the creative flair of designers with the practicality of seasoned landscapers — so your outdoor space isn't just visionary on paper, but also beautifully built in the real world.

Whether you're looking for a full design and construct service, or just a fresh design only, we're here to help bring your dream garden to life, with structure, beauty, and a touch of the unexpected. Let's create something truly you.

► Visit us at [shapeandform.com.au](https://shapeandform.com.au)

✉ Or drop us a line at [info@shapeandform.com.au](mailto:info@shapeandform.com.au)  
we love talking about the potential all new gardens.







# From a Design Point of View

Scott Bartho