

INTERVIEW

A green eye on growing trends

Kirsty McLuckie sits with garden designer Lisa Lempink to discuss her business and the more sustainable ways homeowners can get more out of their outdoor spaces

Job title Garden designer, I have been running my own company, Lempink Garden Design for the last 16 years. Most of my business is based around Edinburgh, East Lothian, the Borders, Fife and central, but I work all over Scotland.

What does the job involve? I offer a full range of services from consultations – which can just be a client wanting an hour or two's advice on a garden or comments on their own design – or we can produce a detailed brief for a garden design, based on their wishes.

A survey would be done, the concept plans are produced with detailed drawings and 3D illustrations.

Once those are complete, the clients can take the brief to their own contractor, but most people will look to me to bring in contractors for the landscaping work.

Once the hard landscaping is done, I draw up a planting plan, buy all the plants, and then set them out in the positions in which they'll grow. And I can bring in a team to do the planting.

Who are your clients? The majority are over-50, a lot of them have decided to stay in their current home for years – their kids have left and they are getting round to sorting out their garden so that it can be really enjoyed.

What are the current trends? There is a growing awareness of plants that will bring in birds, bees and



butterflies, and everyone asks about that. Wildflower meadows are very popular too.

Sustainability in garden design is really important, people are interested in reusing materials so they have to don't cart things away only to replace them with something else. Using natural

Lisa Lempink forms another plan, main; one of her planting schemes based around a pond, top, and a front garden design for a circular drive, above.
Pictures: Paul Johnston

Career development I undertook CPD (continuing professional development) courses myself, and researched anything I could find online related to garden design.

I subsequently joined entrepreneurial networks and found my first clients among other small business owners.

Home life I live in Ravelston, Edinburgh, with my partner, Mark Pearson, who works in IT for Scottish Forestry.

resources is much more prevalent now.

Low-maintenance has always been an attraction – I've only ever had one client who asked for a high maintenance garden!

And there is a huge growth in gardens designed for entertaining. Fire pits and pizza ovens are a big thing to families with kids.

How long does it take? All garden designers have experienced clients phoning and asking you to start immediately because they want to upgrade before selling. But all competing garden designers have waiting lists.

And while there are plenty of things you can do to make your garden look better in the short term, if you want a proper overhaul and redesign you need to plan well in advance.

I have occasionally done a quick fix on a property for sale – replacing all the plants in an existing border in a

front garden, for instance. But, for most people, if you want a garden looking its best for a certain date, you need a very long lead-in time. Two to three years for it to really get established.

How much does it cost? It is a major investment and a lot of people don't have the budget to achieve exactly what they want. Maybe 15 years ago you could get an average garden – six metres by 14 metres – redesigned for £10,000, now that is more likely to be £30,000.

Labour is by far the biggest cost, as you are probably employing three people for around three weeks. On top of that, you have materials and plants. My fees are about 10 to 15 per cent of the overall cost.

But we do work with the clients to manage their budgets – we don't like to compromise on design but we can lower costs by changing the materials. And there are clever



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design tricks if you are on a budget – using the right plants to offer shade, screening or height is a much cheaper option to hard landscaping.

Which are your favourite plants to work with? I like salvias, I think they are really lovely and there is a broad range of them.

I love heucheras and heucherellas, you grow them for the colour of the leaves and you can get pink, purple, caramels, and marmalade colours, as well as lime green.

And there is a lovely grass called

Acorus ogon which is yellow and can give a pop of colour in the shade or in the sun, so it is a really useful plant for people to try.

What plants should gardeners avoid? I would always advise people to research plants before putting them in the garden to make sure they aren't really invasive. One I never use is Lady's mantle – *Alchemilla mollis* – which is beautiful but it self-seeds everywhere to the point it becomes an infestation in every nook and cranny.

And I know people like the look of a wild garden, but you do need to be careful with something that can take over the whole space.

Research the plants you are buying and try and match them with positions, soil conditions and the amount of light where they will thrive. But there is also always a percentage of loss with plants – no matter how well you treat them. Some plants are just moody.

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