

# Lighting & WATER

With little effort (and a few tricks), these two elements can add great personality to gardens of all sizes. Anthony Noel

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE a beautiful garden without water. The very heartbeat is missing, and, of course, water is life itself—an essential element in the perfect, private world that we all strive to create in our gardens. However small the space, we can still indulge our fantasies. We can make water naturalistic and its environs luxuriantly planted. We can create elegant formal pools. We can tumble it over great mossy rocks, or we can throw it up in the air and light it from below so that, at night, the reflections make a thousand tiny stars in the garden.

So many people mistakenly think that having water in their gardens is wickedly luxurious. I remember as a young actor making my first garden in London that I wanted a pond, and so I literally used the kitchen sink. With all the confidence of youth, I formally placed it against the garden wall opposite a cast-iron chair as if it were the Trevi fountain itself.

I chipped the glaze off the sink, raised it on a couple of brick stacks, then filled it with cobblestones to hide the overflow pipe leading to a recirculating



pump below. Five boxwood spheres in old flowerpots, which I striped in worn-out blue and white, hid the small reservoir underneath. These were in turn flanked by two large squares of boxwood planted in the ground. I found a chipped lion's head with the most benevolent expression I have ever seen (all joking apart, make sure that you like the faces on garden ornaments that you choose) in the garden center at the end of the road. The project was completed by hiding the water pipes in the wall. No great amounts of money were involved—I think a few hundred dollars, even after the cables were laid and everything was up and running—but

the garden was transformed.

**CHOOSING A STYLE** There are so many ways of using water in even the smallest of spaces. For a rustic style, you could have nothing more than a wooden tub containing a treasured waterlily. Or you could use an old stone sink fed by a simple wall-mounted mask as I did. Enhance the rustic feel by overgrowing it to such an extent that all you really notice is the sound of trickling water. Is there anything much pret-

tier, or more suitable for a small space, than a mad tumble of old-fashioned roses, cabbages, and love-in-a-mist, anyway?

Apart from natural streams, ponds, and waterfalls, of course, there is only one other way I know of making manmade, informal water work in small spaces, and that is Japanese gardens. Their strong but subtle curves break all the rules in a confined space—they make no attempt to blend with the boundaries—yet somehow, these gardens work wonderfully. Perhaps it is their strength and restraint, with their teahouses, gnarled pines, informal water, and judiciously placed boulders set in immaculately raked areas of sand, that make them so beautiful—and everything is made using natural materials, too.

**USING OVERSCALE** Scale is probably the most important quality in garden design, and it is an area where most gardeners are too cautious. In general, it's preferable to have a few large-scale pieces or plants, rather than lots of small elements.

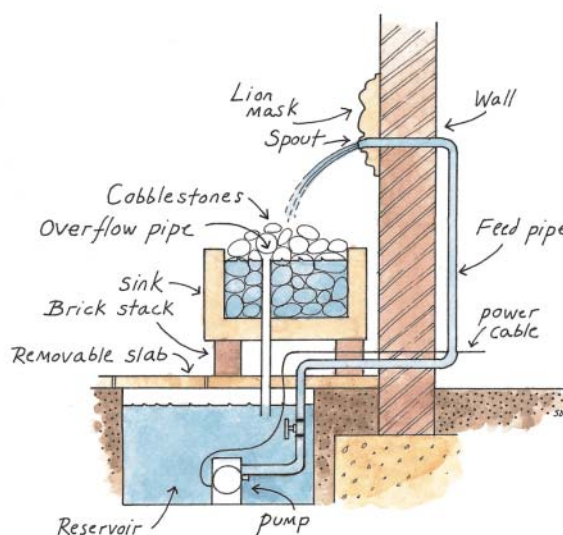
When it comes to water, therefore, make your pond as big as space will allow—think of those reflections!—and if you go for a naturalistic pool, the fish and plants will not only look much better, but will be happier and healthier, too. Although not tiny by most city gardeners' standards, the late garden designer Russell Page's elegant courtyard for the Frick Museum in New York city is an excellent example of how one can add drama to small spaces by using elements that are out of scale. The large reflecting pool takes up nearly a quarter of the garden and acts like a looking glass in a room, doubling the sense of space. So take a tip from the great man and be generous: with the sky as your ceiling, almost anything outside should be larger in scale than might at first seem appropriate. When in doubt, overscale. It is one of the secrets of great garden design.

**VIRTUES OF GOOD PLACEMENT** Any strong design element in the garden needs to be well placed. It should provide a sort of visual full stop, from which our eyes can rest for a moment and then move on. The best-placed pool that I have ever done was a raised one placed about 20 feet from the house, directly opposite large French windows and

## A Simple Fountain with Flair

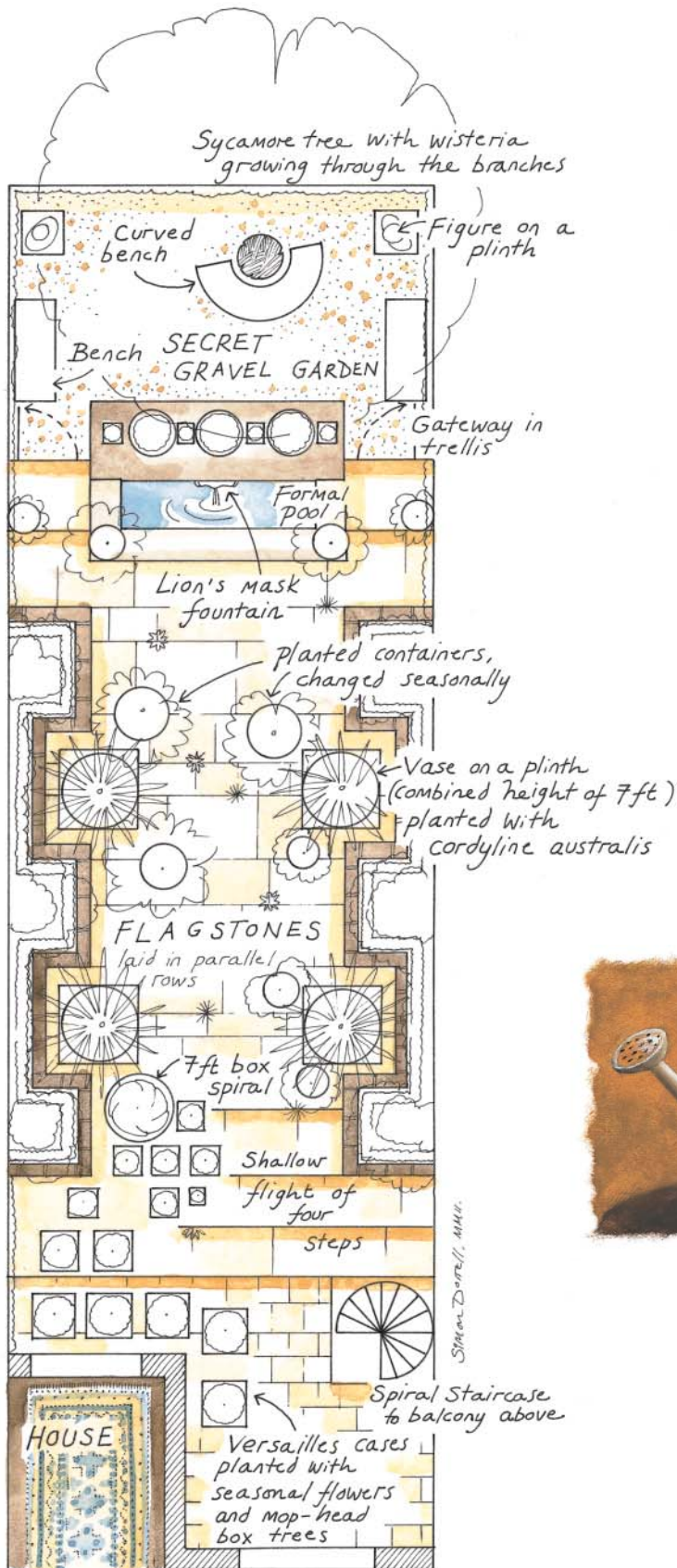


The design and installation of a small fountain needs neither a large budget nor a team of contractors. To create a fountain in my own little garden, I bought an old kitchen sink, which I stripped of its glazing then stood on stacks of weathered bricks. I filled the basin with cobbles, which hide an overflow pipe that leads to a small reservoir below. (The reservoir is itself hidden by a wall of boxwoods in brightly painted pots.) A recirculating pump sits in the base of the reservoir, and a short bit of piping carries water up to a lion's head fountain that I bought from the garden center at the end of my street. The wiring was equally simple and straightforward, but the results transformed the garden.





Putting the pieces together—an overview of the authors' garden.



on axis with the front door.

The first thing you saw and heard was the formal pool with its huge verdigris mask of Neptune gushing water, complete with side jets. In front of this, for fun, I placed old galvanized watering cans that I striped in chartreuse and old white. The mask was set into a rustic-looking chimney, and it dominated the flagstoned courtyard garden and hall. In summer it was lovely to fling the windows open and let the cool sound of the water infiltrate the house.

So place your pool well, perhaps framing it between two hedges or terminating a vista. Or let it take center stage, like a beautiful rug, a round table, or a pair of sofas would indoors.

Why not have a half-concealed rustic sink in one part of the garden and a larger, formal pool with a jet in the main area? If it could be arranged, a beautiful way of doing this would be to go through shade to reach the distant sparkle of your fountain in a sunny, half-hidden area. The effect would be similar to seeing a crystal chandelier from a somewhat austere lit hall. When I mentioned my first garden and how the kitchen sink had been formally placed as if it were as important as the Trevi fountain, there was more than a little method in my madness.

**ADDING LIGHT** Water is wonderful in any garden. Deep, silent, and mysterious is one thing, but when it is moving and sparkling the whole place comes to life. And when you light it at night—wow! The most wonderful lighting effect I have ever created happened by complete accident. I placed a couple of underwater spotlights beneath two side jets in opposite corners of a raised pool. As darkness fell, and the lights were turned on, the illuminated droplets were reflected all over the garden like hundreds of golden spangles.

Whether you are lighting water or anything else in the garden, you will not go far wrong if you stick to the golden rule that I learned in the theater: Many small light sources are far better than a few large ones. In exactly the same way that a room is more



attractive when lit by several low table lamps than one central light, gardens (and people) look better when the lights are low. Formal pools should be lit from below the water's surface to avoid dazzle, whereas informal water should be lit from behind rocks or bushes near the water rather than in it, as discreetly as possible (who wants to see all those roots lit up?).

Uplighting is always glamorous, whether as low-voltage, underwater halogen spotlights in a pool, ultramodern stainless-steel portholes piercing old flagstones beneath a great urn, or tiny, adjustable low-voltage spotlights hidden behind large plants, topiary, and tubs. Uplighting also makes wonderful silhouettes of trees and other taller shapes against the night sky.

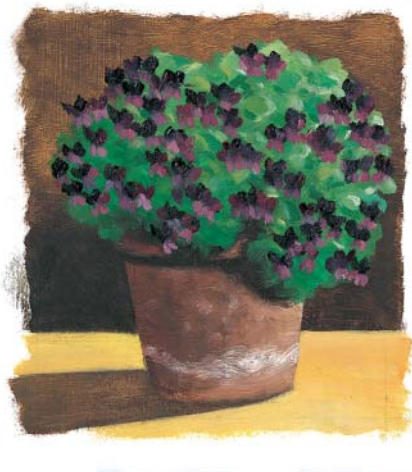
Small spots are excellent because of their flexibility. You can play around to your heart's content. For instance, some things might look better in shadow or silhouette or even, in the case of a neigh-

boring eyesore, lost entirely. With several circuits, you have further flexibility; perhaps just the fountain without the underwater lights, or if one group of

plants were at their peak, they could be dramatically lit on their own. It is also a good idea to have all your lights on a dimming system to suit the occasion—low for a quiet supper under the stars, or full-up for a lively party.

If ever there was a golden age for small gardens, it is now. Not only is it easier to visit inspiring places, but the wealth of good, affordable reproduction garden ornaments has never been better. There are fiberglass tanks,

masks, fountains, and urns in fake lead, marble, and bronze that would fool the most fastidious eye. You can find classical figures, columns, and balustrades of reconstituted stone, which after gentle distressing with hammer, earth, and yogurt will bring all the gravitas of ancient Rome to your garden—at a fraction of the real thing's price. ♡



## Planting

Give any water plenty of space, with no clutter, just good, simple, generous planting. Have you ever noticed, too, how beautiful weeping trees and shrubs look in the proximity of water? Even if there isn't room for a weeping willow (*Salix babylonica*)—surely the ultimate water-side tree—plant almost anything spreading or weeping in the foreground. The gracious branches of magnolia, Judas tree, or mulberry come to mind, through or under which your pool could be seen. Whatever you decide, it is important that your pond not be too shallow. Eighteen inches is an absolute minimum for looks, plants, and wildlife, and be generous: fill it up to the brim. Nothing looks worse than a foot of concrete between the copingstone and water surface.

—A.N.

## Safety

When dealing with water and lighting, always think of safety. Insist on a circuit-breaker. Use low-voltage lights both in and out of the water, and have your work done by a qualified electrician. If you have young children (they are all fascinated by water), either wait until they are older and use your pond as a sandbox, or install a ready-made wallfountain, or have a lion's mask spurting into an old sink full of large cobblestones—they will provide an interesting change of texture. Make sure that doorways and steps are well lit.

—A.N.