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SPACE TO TREASURE

Rethinking the family garden in Hockley with Earth Designs, to make them functional and fabulous for multiple uses

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BETTER PERSPECTIVE PHOTOGRAPHY**

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Family gardens have a rather bad reputation. We tend to think of them as unattractive and unimaginative spaces. The images they conjure are messy, muddy and rarely pretty. Usually with minimal planting (because who has time to look after plants when you've got young children?) and toys strewn across what's left of the lawn.

But things are changing in the world of family gardens. The time of the muddy backyard is over. Functional and fabulous family gardens are where it's at – as this family garden in Hockley, designed by local garden designer Katrina Kieffer-Wells, of Earth Designs, perfectly demonstrates.

Since lockdown, many are beginning to realise the value of their outdoor space. Not only monetary value (although having a well designed garden can add substantial value to your home) but in personal, social and wellbeing terms too.

As Katrina says “As individuals, social beings and family units we all benefit from time outdoors. And we're beginning to understand that spending time in the garden as a family has a lot more to offer than we previously thought.”

So what can the family garden offer us?

As a family, gardens can be places to cook and share food together and create memories. With thoughtful layout and design, they can also be spaces to play, learn and grow. But most important of all, they can do all that





without becoming the boring and unloved spaces we are used to. It's perfectly possible for them to be beautifully designed spaces that are practical and pretty and grow with us over time.

When Earth Designs were asked to redesign this family garden in Hockley, the brief was to create a modern family garden with multiple areas for eating and relaxing.

The property was only a few years old and like many new builds, the existing garden design and planting were minimal. The owners, however, love plants and wanted a lush modern garden, bursting with variety and life that reflected their family lifestyle, with areas to entertain friends and eat as a family. Also high on the wishlist was a dedicated play area for their young daughter.

The shape of the plot is unusual and almost triangular, at right-angles to the house, with a lower level on one side. The garden is wide across the breadth of the house, but not as deep and is overlooked on one side. The challenge for Earth Designs was to meet all the family's needs while also bringing harmony and life into a somewhat dead space.

Taking inspiration from the inviting curves of the boundary wall, the basis of their design uses a series of interlocking curvaceous pathways. These serve not only as a design feature, but also divide the garden into various spaces. Curves are always pleasing to the eye, but they also give an illusion of depth. Rounded planting beds allow the edges of

'We're beginning to understand that spending time in the garden as a family has a lot more to offer than we previously thought'



the plot to become blurred, making it seem deeper, while also allowing plenty of plants, including taller specimen plants that make the space more private and less overlooked.

Following the circular theme, an oval patio sits nestled in the far corner from the house, in an ideal vantage point from which to admire the rest of the garden. It's easy to imagine spending long summer evenings

here with a glass of wine and a good friend, or catching up on family news and enjoying cosy chats as the sun sets. A corten steel fire table at the centre provides a focal point and an opportunity to continue talking, even after sundown.

During the daytime, the pleasing curvature of the lawn and pathways rush out to meet you, like waves on the shore. ➔



An array of contrasting and complementary colours and materials lap over each other. A pathway of black basalt planks cuts into soft grass and pale sandstone, for instance, then overlaps another pathway made from autumn brown stone. Each element is satisfyingly distinct from the other, or neatly edged with corten steel. The deep circular beds in between overflow with voluptuous white hydrangeas and a tapestry of greenery.

Follow the basalt pathway from the back door across the back of the house to find a second small seating area outside the bifold doors. Ideal for tired parents to enjoy a cup of coffee while watching their children play. Continue following the curve around the house, down a few steps and you find a third, larger patio. This area hosts a dining table and quarter-circle timber bench.

They are contained by a bespoke white, curved wall, which is set against a backdrop of foliage.

Like a tropical storm, clouds of heavy greenery tumble over each other in the border behind, creating a softly-sheltered private dining space for family meals.

On the opposite side of the house, a secret play area is only given away by the top of the timber tipi playhouse peeking over the foliage. Hidden amongst the leaves is an outdoor adventure area for the smaller members of the family, cushioned with play bark and strung with fairy lights.

Overhead, a hoist for a cocoon chair is poised, ready to provide a quiet escape for stories and snuggles.

The garden is a year old, but you can feel the potential for memories to be made here. New life waits in the wings, ready to burst

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forth, and as the plants establish they will be a spectacle to behold.

The garden has been transformed from dead space to one that invites modern, functional and stylish family outdoor living.

But the real value of this newly designed family garden, however, is in the opportunities it creates to share and enjoy each other’s

company. To watch your children grow and play outdoors in a safe and stimulating environment. Or enjoy time, catching up with family and friends. This is how family gardens should be – adaptable, beautiful, sociable and ripe with possibility.

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