In Jilayne's north London front garden, glittering *Stipa gigantea*, spires of *Digitalis purpurea* and *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus* contrast with sumptuous *Paeonia* 'Buckeye Belle' and blue-flowered *Iris sibirica* 'Tropic Night'.

Versatile design in front

Responding to everyday demands required of her North London front garden, Jilayne Rickards employed key design principles to introduce colourful, wildlife-friendly planting and space to park a car

Author: **Jilayne Rickards,** garden designer based in London.
Photography: **Marianne Majerus**

In a time when more and more front gardens are being paved over to allow for off-road parking, there is increasing pressure on home owners and garden designers to find ways to make these spaces functional and beautiful. I live on a tree-lined street that leads to local woods, and am lucky to have a slightly larger than average (for north London) front garden. Although only half an hour from the City, the road is generally quiet (until the school run starts), and I wanted my garden to blend in with the rest of the street – with a relaxed feel.

In late 2011, having just sold our previous house and moved into rented accommodation (while the new house underwent renovation), there was a lot happening for my family so the design for the front garden did not get the same amount of thought that I would normally give to such a project. I approached the garden on an instinctive level, trusting my experience – if it felt right I went with it.

Front gardens are so important – they greet us as we come home and can affect how we feel about our homes. They can support house values; reduce »

Feb18 Jilayne Rickard__The Garden 50-51

05/12/2017 16:47

Recycled York stepping stones lend a relaxed feel to a curved path that cuts through the planting, with *Thymus* and *Stachys byzantina* 'Silver Carpet' growing in gravel. *Iris* 'Tropic Night' adds a splash of blue.

Clipped box spheres are planted along the driveway – the space between them is the same distance as the three window panels, creating a connection to the house.

'I wanted my front garden to attract and support wildlife, and to be mostly planted, but we did need space for our car.'

Drawing out the garden to scale before you start allows you to check spaces will work. I left enough space for a car, while ensuring the planting takes up at least 50 percent of the space.

flooding and stormwater damage; and introduce homes for wildlife in built-up areas. I wanted my front garden to attract and support wildlife, and to be mostly planted, but we did need space for our car.

Understanding the plot

The area at the front of the house measures 14 x 10m (46 x 33ft) and slopes towards the pavement. Originally there were two entrances to the garden – a set of steps to the front door and a large strip of concrete to the garage, which resulted in too much unsightly concrete paving. Planting was nondescript and the garden felt tired and dull.

The soil was heavy clay – the stuff that sticks to boots and spades and doubles their weight. We incorporated huge amounts of grit and horse manure before planting. Although the garden faces southwest, due to a large street tree it is in semi-shade with a precious patch of sunshine at the top.

Design and planting

I employed my usual four design techniques: a grid system that relates back to the house to give a strong connection between the two; no more than three hard landscaping materials; repeat planting groups for continuity and rhythm; and planting for all seasons.

I used curves to relate to the surrounding tree canopies, which also gave the garden an organic flow. A low retaining wall was built along the boundary with the pavement, using the same brick as the house, with York stone used as setts for the driveway and for the steps and landing.

I chose to begin by selecting the structural plants for the garden, planting them within the grid system, and later filled the spaces with soft grasses, perennials and bulbs. Over a cold but bright weekend in January 2012 I planted a boundary hedge of *Griselinia littoralis*, which adds privacy and a lovely backdrop for more planting. Clipped box (*Buxus*) spheres and pyramids give further structure, along with semi-evergreen shrub *Abelia* x *grandiflora* and highly scented, winter-flowering shrubs *Sarcococca confusa* and *Daphne odora*. I also included four small trees: *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, apple 'Scrumptious' and two *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki'.

In March of that same year I began adding some softer planting that would provide both texture and colour, such as tall grass *Stipa gigantea*, purple-flowering *Veronicastrum virginicum*, thistle-like *Cirsium rivulare* 'Atropurpureum' and deep crimson-flowered *Knautia macedonica*. Lower-level planting combines the delicate purple-blue flowers of *Iris* 'Tropic Night' with showy, ruby-red blooms of *Paeonia* 'Buckeye Belle' and a mix of alliums – I look forward to this display every year.

Now, six years on, I look forward to the nerve-wracking pleasure of opening both my front and back gardens to the public – and my industry colleagues and fellow designers – to have a good nose around. Hopefully they will agree that this front garden is not a designer's statement – it is about more than appearances – but of benefit to the house and the rest of the street, for people and for wildlife. **O**

Jilayne's tips for planning your own front garden

1 Think of a theme (such as formal, contemporary, or wildlife friendly) and try to ensure your design and planting decisions relate back to it.

2 Draw out the garden to scale and link it with the house where possible – for example, making border edges line up with windows. This ensures that the space can accommodate what you want.

3 Consider the practical aspects of the space and allow enough room for these. Where will the bins go? How much space does a car need? How wide do paths need to be?

4 Choose a maximum of three landscaping materials and repeat them across the space to give continuity to the design. Too many materials in a small space will make it feel messy and fragmented.

5 Plant for year-round interest, with plenty of structure. If you include some scent near the front door, it will greet you when you come home.

SIMON ROBINSON

Resources

Jilayne's front and back gardens will be open for the National Gardens Scheme on 20 May 2018; **ngs.org.uk**

Contact: studio@jilaynerickards.com; 07801 946878.

For practical advice and inspiration to create your own welcoming front garden, and to find out more about the RHS Greening Grey Britain campaign, visit **rhs.org.uk/ggb**

Feb18 Jilayne Rickard__The Garden 52-53

05/12/2017 16:47