

# The Natural Ingredient



With spring just around the corner, Landscape Designer Kevin Cooper highlights the key element and the most useful design ingredient in any garden... The planting!

When designing and creating any garden or outside space, there can be no more crucial or exciting an ingredient than the planting. There are a myriad of different ways of harnessing the inspirational beauty of the natural world to help us in our homes and lifestyle, from the practical to the sensual. One key objective when designing a garden for any property is to integrate not just home and garden, but to allow the dwelling to sit comfortably in the surrounding landscape, if one is in the countryside, the use of trees and shrubbery can be invaluable in seamlessly merging home and landscape. In a town setting, the same planting can be used to create a landscape in contrast to, and soften the surrounding buildings, thus creating your own little oasis!

Creating three dimensional structure and character in a garden is important in developing the comfortable and secure feeling needed for one to relax in, and enjoy the outdoors. The garden room should be an integral part of the home, and it is the softness, privacy and shelter carefully designed planting gives that helps to achieve this. Strategically positioning a tree for example to break a sight line can give that all important privacy required, while structured evergreen planting can give shelter and intimacy. Specimen planting can be particularly effective in creating focal points to bring a garden alive, sometimes just one special plant or tree can turn an ordinary garden into something magical. They can be used as the inviting 'draw' that pulls you in with its beauty, or keeps you lingering longer with its warm and character.



Acer Palatum Dissectum, the classic Japanese maple, being an invaluable choice to add dramatic colour and delicate charm, while a weeping specimen such as Cedrus Atlantica Glauca, the weeping Blue Cedar can add a graceful and relaxed atmosphere to any space. For a more contemporary project or to create a more dynamic feel, there is a wonderful selection of exciting palms and bamboos available. When it comes to the choosing and sourcing plants for one of my projects, it becomes an international affair, not only is there a terrific amount of quality stock grown here in Ireland, but we regularly source specimens from Italy, and indeed all over Europe, to as far afield as China! Imagination is our only limit.

While it may be important to use specimens and larger plants to create structure, it is the smaller plants and flowers that develop the unique heart and soul to the garden, giving one the opportunity to let the artistic imagination run wild. A subtle mixing of foliage shrubs, flowering shrubs and herbaceous plants will ensure a year round enjoyment of the garden, with a sprinkling of bulbs to give that magical burst in spring!

Whether the garden is large or small, it is always the planting that bring it to life, combining with the hard landscaping to create something beautiful, a little haven where one can escape to and relax. The therapeutic beauty of nature never ceases to amaze and delight, and if we can harness it in some small way each day, the richer we will be... Enjoy 🌿

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