

form and function



ABC Gardening Australia's newest presenter, MEREDITH KIRTTON, visits a garden where a love of intricate shapes marries with a passion for produce

Strawberries spill onto the Tree of Life path through the pomegranate walk.

This extraordinary garden is a delicious blend of contrasting influences and opposing ideas.

East meets west, the edible neighbours the ornamental and organic shapes combine with geometric. Meandering paths made of intricate mosaic stonework weave in and out between quince, walnut, olive, fig and pomegranate trees.

Landscape designer and contractor Phil Stray confesses that the whole space was very nearly flattened, as his original intention when he bought the property had been to subdivide the block into two.

“The more I lived here, however, the more I began to become enchanted with the amazing legacy of its previous owner, a Greek guy called Jimmy,” Phil explains. “Now I love the fruit and particularly look forward to the fig season, which lasts from early February to early May because of all the different varieties.”

Once he had become convinced to put down roots himself, Phil set about implementing his own design ideas and landscape solutions. The first project he undertook was a pomegranate walk, which features a fabulous stone mosaic path with a Celtic-style Tree of Life motif swirling along its length.

He has always been fascinated by traditional motifs, from Celtic knots to Japanese symbols and Maori totems. In fact, he seriously considered getting a tattoo of the Tree of Life on his arm, but gave up on the idea when he reasoned his arms were “too small and wrinkly”! Luckily for the garden (and his arm), the symbol became inscribed in pebbles instead, the result of about five days of hard work for five men.

Not ready to slow down, Phil's next project was an unusual patio, inspired by the Greek legend of the labyrinth-dwelling Minotaur. Phil's maze patio is made from



A potted bay tree forms a centrepiece in the kitchen garden.

sawn bluestone and black pebbles, and took three men only three days to complete. It is so successful that a representative from the Labyrinth Society has photographed it and has taken the images to the US for viewing at the society's international convention.

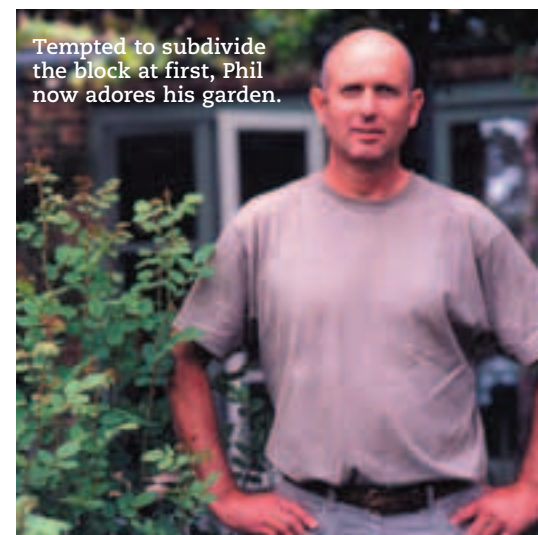
Phil's obsession with the energy in spirals, patterns and mazes has often been included in his landscaping work. He regularly works on kindergarten and school grounds and says that the children who use these spaces share his enthusiasm for intricate shapes.

However, he concedes that the ‘yin and yang’ lawn was the result of an fortuitous mix-up. Phil planted some Kentucky blue grass over a bare patch of ground, which grew into the existing kikuyu. That winter, when the kikuyu yellowed in the cold, the Asian symbol of interdependent opposites magically showed up in the grass. Phil decided to trim it and work with it, placing two round mosaics as the dots in the symbol to add to nature's work.

In celebration of his new-found love of edible plants, Phil planted more edibles, including tamarillos, additional citrus, Jerusalem artichokes and each summer

has a large pumpkin vine growing over his shed. He also created a fond homage to Jimmy: an impressive iron pergola over the patio covered with a profusion of grapevines.

“Jimmy had a small one which I always bumped my head on,” explains Phil. “So I replaced it with a larger version which is a much more comfortable height!”



Tempted to subdivide the block at first, Phil now adores his garden.

Meet the designer

Phil Stray of Crafted Landscapes has 30 years' experience as a landscape design contractor, but “having kids and a garden myself has been the greatest teacher”, he says. Phil now focuses on schools and kindergartens, creating exciting child-friendly landscapes that include boulders, creeks, beaches and sandpits. Call 0414 343 917.

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Grapevines trained over a frame shade the labyrinth patio.

thoughts for food

Use Phil's design prowess to make the most of your fruit and vegetables.

- 1 Grapevines create a 'roof' over the patio (*left*), growing on a metal pipe framework with a cross in the centre, which gives it a spider's web feel.
- 2 Pumpkins grow really well over structures, like Phil's old shed and clothesline – and get less mildew than if they grow along the ground.
- 3 Try fruit hedges for an edible border. Phil's raspberry hedge acts as a 'room divider', underplanted with strawberries as the 'floor'.
- 4 Consider the ornamental quality of some edibles. Phil's tamarillos and ruby chard are used as foliage plants as much as for harvesting.
- 5 Herbs like chives and rosemary – plus garlic and chillies – look great and are handy if grown near the kitchen.

create the look

Focal points, patterns, geometry and creating garden 'rooms' can give small gardens a centre of focus and help make them seem much larger than they really are. Here are some of Phil's ingenious tricks of the landscape-design trade:



Box it in

Even messy or ephemeral plants like vegetables and herbs can be greatly improved in appearance by being enclosed in a permanent border, like this hedge of box honeysuckle around Phil's kitchen garden. It gives the space a greater sense of structure.



Go to ground

This yin and yang lawn comprises two varieties of turf – Kentucky blue grass and kikuyu. Any ground covers planted en masse together could give you a similar effect, and many patterns can be created. This is especially effective in gardens that are looked down upon.



Pull focus

A terracotta pot of *Astelia* 'Silver Spears', underplanted with cascading *Dichondra* 'Silver Falls', forms a focal point amid the swathe of grass-like tufts of liriopoe. Ornamental pots are a great way of adding instant height and focus to the gardenscape.



Bright Mediterranean colours feature in the broken-tile treatment of this small deck, with the purple element of the design referencing the brightly painted stucco wall behind. Loose pebbles complete the casual effect.

Walls and the ground are not the only things that can benefit from a mosaic makeover. This whimsical pony sculpture looks jolly handsome in his ceramic outfit, and makes a charming addition to this garden.

In this ambitious project, a fountain and its pools have been covered in small pebbles, which have also been painstakingly arranged in an intricate pattern over the area leading to the water feature.

step-by-step: how to make a mosaic

A little effort can result in a very rewarding feature you'll treasure.

- 1** Mix 3 parts washed sand and 1 part cement with water and bonding agent, to make a mortar that forms stiff peaks.
- 2** Select a flat concreted site for your mosaic. Sweep clean and mark off the area to be pebbled, then shovel on your mortar – the depth depends on the size of your pebbles, but the standard is 7cm.
- 3** Level off the mortar with a trowel, spreading it to the edges, using long, sweeping strokes – don't dab at it.
- 4** Screed the mortar with a concrete screed or long, straight piece of wood with a handle attached on the top edge.
- 5** Set the pebbles so they sit about 1cm above the level of the mortar, with the flattest surface facing upwards.
- 6** Tap the pebbles down with a trowel, and work the slurry that rises between them into any gaps. Leave until the mortar starts to harden, then hose down with a misty spray. Two days later, brush a 4 to 1 mixture of hydrochloric acid and water over with a broom to remove excess mortar from the surface of the pebbles.

