

## Creative Design for a Narrow Front Garden

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The start of spring brings gardeners outdoors, energised and ready to implement the ideas they've ruminated on through winter. So, let's get creative.

If you're faced with a long and narrow strip of front yard, what choices do you have? So often the default design is an unimaginative rectangle, but, what sense of intrigue then draws you into the garden? Imagine instead meandering curves, mounds of foliage, striking bark, and punches of seasonal colour all of which invite you along its length to engage with the plants and their tiny resident organisms.

There is another advantage to curved borders; increased bed size. A rectangle provides a uniform and narrow width, usually more lawn or paving than bed. A circle, on the other hand, pushes the edges out to more generous proportions. The extra meters open space up for small trees and shrubs and encourage the designer to plant in clusters rather than straight stripes!

Use a sun-warmed hosepipe to broadly outline the curves until you're happy with the result. The more mathematically minded can dust off the compass and measuring tape to get those semi-circles just right. Place focal points where they accentuate the apex of the curve to move the eye along. Here, Jenny uses rocks, stones and a ground-based bird bath to repeat the colour of the gravel area and break up the stretch of green.

Small trees provide the vertical dimension – *Cussonia zuluensis*, *Dombeya tiliacae*, *Heteropyxis natalensis*, *Buddleja saligna*, and *Rothmannia globosa*. A favourite cameo here is set back between the *Cussonia* and *Dombeya*, where the burnished copper trunk of *Commiphora harveyi* emerges from the soft grey felt of *Helichrysum petiolare*, with bright emerald green *Agapanthus* leaves behind. A quite gorgeous albeit subtle arrangement lifted by the addition of a patch of red and olive green leaves of *Crassula streyi*.

Though the sleeper path dissects the space, the use of the ground-hugging Silver Carpet between the pavers knits the design together. *Dymondia margaretae* takes some foot traffic, is frost and drought tolerant, and never seems to outgrow its space. Small yellow daisies tuck among the leaves from spring to early summer – and on and off through the year. Plants will take some light shade but die back if overwatered. Mats may need rejuvenating after a few years; dig up, split, and replant immediately.

A submerged water basin covered with river stones and edged with log rolls, and a grinding stone provides ground-level water for wildlife. They're surrounded by plants at home in damp soils; the heavy grass-like leaves of *Ornithogalum juncifolius*, a perennial growing in damp places in grasslands, spill over the hard edges. Behind, *Crocasmia aurea*, the beautiful

orange-flowering Falling Stars, thrives in light and semi-shade. On the other side of the path, *Crassula expansa* subsp. *fragilis* softly cushions the grinding stone. In summer tiny white flowers dust the plant like confetti. It seems happy to defy the subspecies name, *fragilis*, for I've seen plants thrive in dry or moist soils, sun and light shade though plants look stronger where they're protected from the midday sun and harsh frost, though soils must drain well. Combining beautifully with the tiny *Crassula* in this damp cameo is *Senecio speciosus*, another damp grassland species with delightful large mauve daisies and oblong, toothed leaves. This frost hardy groundcover looks freshest in damp soils but copes surprisingly well in your average garden soil down in Kloof. In dry, inland regions, it will need moist soils or regular water.

#### Other Plants:

*Agapanthus praecox* forms the background planting beneath the trees on both sides of the path, forming a spectacular show of waist high blue and white globes through summer. Even the dead seed heads make a show. Aggies are frost hardy.

*Crassula sarmentosa* forms a neat, rounded plant (35 x 35 cm) with dense sprays of white and pink stars from summer to autumn. Leaves have slightly toothed margins, and in a dry season, are tinged red. Plants grown in semi- shade remain green with just a touch of winter red. Plants cope with a moderate frost, are water wise, tolerant of drought, and will grow in sandy soils. In small spaces, keep neat and inbounds by breaking off wandering limbs.

The Campfire Crassula, *Crassula capitella*, is a small spreading succulent with thick, fleshy leaves and dense white flower heads for much of the year, with a peak in summer to autumn.

*Bulbine latifolia* is a perfect height for the little Crassula as it flows around and beneath the fat, succulent leaves.

All species are loved by bees and butterflies and cope with a moderate frost.