



Almost hidden behind tall purple thistles, flax, and massively dramatic banana palms, Gray's outdoor dining area is a secluded spot to while away summer evenings with friends.

'I wanted the wow factor without the work'

Craig Robinson's awkwardly shaped plot was the inspiration for a stunning, stylish and stress-free garden that's the perfect place for entertaining – or simply chilling out ▶



The deck patio is a real suntrap. High, stainless-steel planters each side of the garden break up the bamboo fencing that runs the length of the space. The garden was designed by Earth Designs (020-8541 9040; www.earthdesigns.co.uk).

When Craig Robinson first moved into his house, the garden was a long plot with nothing in it but fence and grass. 'I wanted to turn it into a private space, where I could relax with friends,' he says. 'It had to be contemporary and have that special wow factor. I also needed a garden that would look good, even if I ignored it for most of the year.'

As Craig works long hours, he had little time to create the new look himself, so he turned to garden designers Earth Designs for help. They came up with a low-maintenance design that makes the most of the plot's long shape, using diagonal decking and a diagonal flowerbed to draw the eye across the space and create the illusion of width, and bamboo fencing for privacy.

As work progressed, Craig was concerned about just how much decking there was. 'I thought, "Bring back my lawn!" But once they started to plant up the flowerbed, I could see it taking shape.' He even got

involved in the planting. 'I love the lilies - I brought one from my grandparents' garden and planted it in my flowerbed.'

So what does Craig think of his new garden? 'It's fantastic! I love the way the new layout gives me different areas to chill out in, either on my own or with friends.'



A water feature makes a focal point at the end of the garden, and hides a shed.





◀ Dull and boring just about summed up the garden when Craig moved into his new home.

GARDEN PLAN

- Size** Approx 65m long and 7m wide (tapering to a point)
- Orientation** South-facing
- Soil** Chalky clay soil
- Main features**
- 1 Decking
- 2 Large flowerbed
- 3 Stainless-steel planters
- 4 Dining table and chairs
- 5 Water feature
- 6 Shed
- 7 Gravelled area



AFRICAN BLUE LILIES
For a really exotic look, you can't beat this beautiful agapanthus, whose blue flowers appear at the height of summer. Look out for hardier varieties that will weather cold spells.
GOOD FOR quite dry soil in a sunny spot



CRAIG'S favourite plants

Be inspired by Craig's choice of low-maintenance sculptural plants with a touch of the exotic



ARUM LILY
With gorgeous flowers appearing in early summer, these are beautiful yet tough.
GOOD FOR boggy soil



YUCCA
Sculptural plants like this look stunning against plain walls or bamboo fencing.
GOOD FOR making a statement



SEDUMS
These easy-care, low-growing evergreen succulents hardly need any watering.
GOOD FOR edging decking or paths



CARDOON THISTLE
Make space for these giants and they'll reward you with colour in late summer.
GOOD FOR height in a flowerbed

PHOTOS: JEFFREY MANNING; ILLUSTRATION: SUE WILSON



Craig's Ronaco dining table and chairs suit the sleek, modern style of the garden. A great buy from B&Q at £158.92, they are robust enough to stay outdoors all year round.