



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

The Small Garden Space

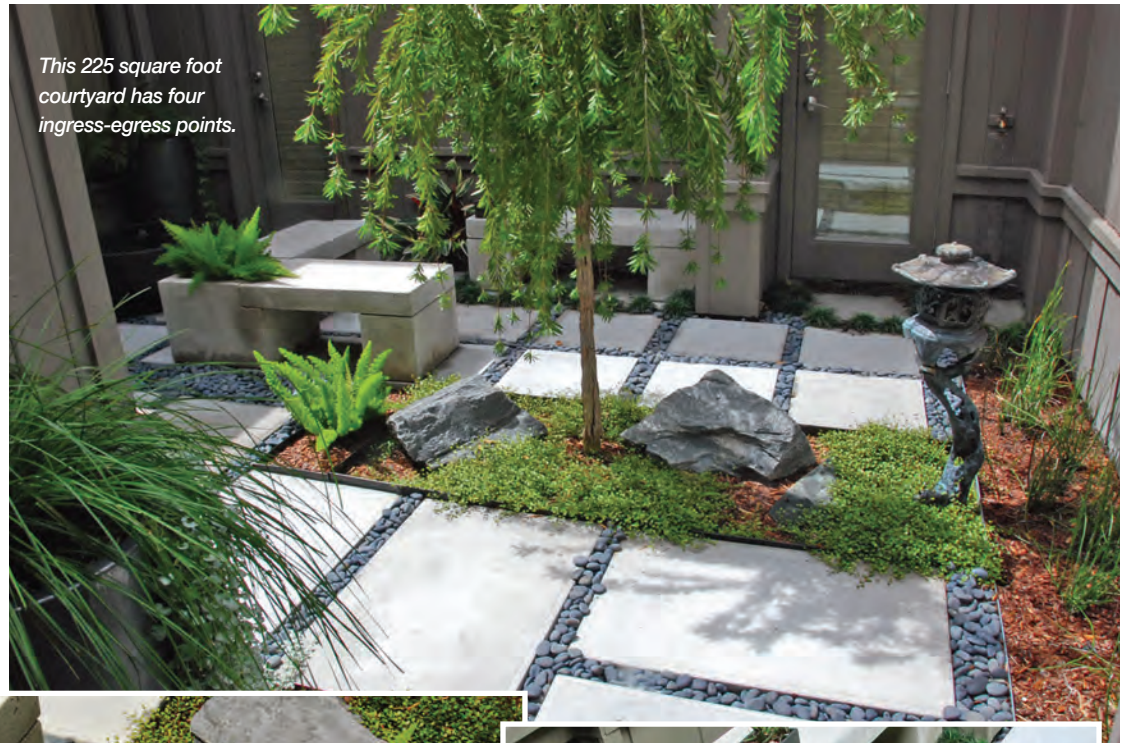
Find a small space to create a garden and it increases the challenge to design it properly. One would think such a design would be easy. Heck, you can't fit much in a tiny area! However, every object and plant as well as colors and patterns take on greater visual significance. The small space eliminates choices - no live oaks, bald cypress trees, huge water features or enormous sculptures. If there is a large object it has to be spectacular, worth the space it uses, and not visually overwhelming.

The design process starts with a thorough analysis of the site. Note utilities (including hose bibbs) and take measurements for door and window sill heights, distances to the overhead eaves, and the depth of the overhangs. If rain water drains into this area, plan for gutters with downspouts piped out of the area. Determine what areas will be shady or sunny through the seasons. There is a distinctive difference between the summer solstice in mid-June, the winter solstice in mid-December, and the areas that receive sunlight. Shade-loving plants could burn and sun-loving ones could languish. The winter sun may be welcomed and the summer sun may need to be filtered. Pay attention to the views to the garden from inside the house. Perhaps a nice focal point can be visible from a dining area or the window over the kitchen sink.

In small spaces it is critical to understand the circulation for how someone enters and leaves the garden and whether an entertaining area or bench space is needed. When selecting the hardscape materials and plants note that smaller patterns and leaf sizes will make the space appear larger. However, larger patterns can add drama. Screening the boundaries can also make a space seem larger. Climbing vines can be kept close to the fence so they take up less space than a hedge so use vines on trellises to screen fences. If you need a bamboo to screen neighboring buildings, select one that does not arch and thus arch over and overwhelm the space.

Plants more diminutive in habit should be chosen so that they do not outgrow the space. Be aware that the word dwarf when attached to a plant name doesn't mean small. It just means smaller than the parent plant. They along with the other elements should be in proportion with each other and in proper scale with the space.

However, the most important aspect of the small garden is that it feels comfortable to you with enough space to meet your needs.



This 225 square foot courtyard has four ingress-egress points.



Above left: Foxtail fern, a boulder and Mexican beach pebbles are scaled to fit the space. Above right: A drainage system lies beneath the pavers. At near left: Carefully select ornaments based on scale, style and color.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis