



1 In among the planting

In the courtyard of an Oxfordshire garden there's just room for a small temporary table and chairs among the topiary and lavender. The effect is casual, understated and almost incidental with delightfully mismatched metal chairs and a rusting table.



2

2 Spring seating

Almost transparent against the grass, a green painted table and chairs invite you to sit in the dappled light beneath a flowering cherry tree. This would be a magical spot when the sun is just warm enough to sit outside and enjoy the first al fresco meal of the season.



3

3 A study in shades

Dominant architecture calls for careful choices of outdoor furniture. Settled against the great stone wall of a barn, these two moveable reclining chairs, in a neutral shade, add a note of cool elegance that blends rather than jars with the setting.



5

4 Urban spaces

Contemporary furniture and strong colours work well in small spaces where the emphasis is on architectural forms. In this city garden, a group of colourful chairs takes centre stage in an intimate dining area formed by a square of pleached limes.



4

5 Clean lines

Simplicity is the key to mixing contemporary with traditional. The minimal lines of these two modern chairs do not look out of place on the terrace of a period house where clipped plants and topiary shapes are the main ingredients.



Arne Maynard is a leading garden designer based in London and Monmouthshire

Garden furniture

Country garden or city courtyard: when you are choosing seating and tables for the garden, consider the context and know your style

WORDS ARNE MAYNARD

DESIGN IDEAS

6 Dressing up

Matching table and chairs can add formality and create the ambience of an outdoor dining area. Comfortable cane armchairs take their place quite naturally on the decked terrace of this streamside garden, where stump willow and iris echo the watery theme.

7 Dressing down

Functional can be beautiful, too. Carved planks on trestles and old fold-up chairs are kept out permanently in this sheltered city garden, creating an alternative dining area that can be used at any time of year.

8 An invitation to stop

The way these two fold-up chairs have been placed beneath a tree on an informal terrace of stone chippings suggests there's a view worth seeing from this spot, or perhaps it's a place to pause and enjoy the nearby borders. They add a human element to the garden.



Whenever we are creating gardens, part of the design process will be how and where we place the garden furniture. Some pieces will be architectural elements and form permanent focal points within the garden – a bench that sits at the end of an axis, say, or a pair of benches tucked into parallel borders. But then you have furniture that isn't part of the architecture and framework of the garden. You discover these secondary pieces, such as seats or tables, as you wander around the garden. There might be an old chair under a beautiful tree in a woodland area or a seat by

a stream. These are surprises and they are placed where you want to draw attention to something, whether it's a view back to the house or out into the landscape, or simply a spot where you can sit and soak up the atmosphere.

It is important to get the placing of these permanent pieces right, and to consider what will suit the context. On the outer edges of the garden, a rustic bench of wood with the bark still on would be in keeping. Closer to the house, seating should be compatible with the style or period of the house. Is it formal or informal? This will influence the intricacy of the design and whether the piece should be



9 Natural resting places

Permanent seating can be beautifully sculptural as well as architectural. Here, against the sheltered house wall of my courtyard garden at Allt-y-bela, an organically shaped oak bench by sculptor Alison Crowther provides a place to sit, rest and look out to the landscape beyond.

Stockists & Suppliers

Paul Anderson – individual pieces hand-made using old oak. Tel 01237 441 645, www.paulandersonart.co.uk

Alison Crowther – furniture hand-made from unseasoned oak. Tel 07775 991957, www.alisoncrowther.com

Designers Guild – A great selection of contemporary furniture. www.designersguild.com

Fermob – contemporary and classic metal furniture. www.fermob.com/en

Arne Maynard – sturdy oak benches and tables. Tel 020 7689 8100, www.arnemaynard.com

wooden, metal, plain or painted. Think, too, about how your choice is going to influence the way people use the garden. A bench with a back to it is going to be more comfortable to sit on for long periods of time, whereas a simple block of wood acts as a transitory perch, a place to stop and pause for a while.

It's also useful to have furniture you can move around or put away in winter, from old-fashioned deck chairs to lightweight pieces that can be placed in sun or shade for impromptu outdoor meals. But if you enjoy eating outside, have a table and chairs that sit permanently on a terrace by the house. Sometimes we'll put

a stone table in a small courtyard to give the space a strong architectural feature, and then dress it up to create a 'tablescape', with an old stone bust or pans of succulents and aeoniums. In spring, little pots of species bulbs give the table life and a purpose and can later be cleared away for eating.

Every season can have its moment. At Guanock, my last garden, we had an old wooden table just outside the house that we used for meals in summer, and in winter I'd cover the whole thing with bird seed so that it became a dining table for the birds. □
NEXT MONTH: Late-summer borders.