

CLAIRE DURKAN GARDEN DESIGN , LIVING WELL OUTDOORS

What Happens When You Work with a Garden Designer?

A Step-by-Step Guide to My Process

Every garden designer works a little differently. This is how I work, from first conversation to finished garden.

My process is rooted in professional training. It means I deliver both the vision and, with a full design, the technical plans your landscaper needs to build a garden you'll enjoy for years to come.

Why I begin with a consultation.

A well-designed garden doesn't happen by chance. It begins with a clear vision, an honest conversation and a good understanding of how you want to live outdoors.

I begin every project with a two-hour consultation in your garden. I'll give you practical, honest insight into what's achievable within your space and budget, and together we'll explore the garden's potential, discuss ideas and work through any challenges. My Process page has the latest details on fees, read on to see how the consultation works.

It's often the most valuable step in the entire process.

Most importantly, the consultation helps me understand your aspirations and how you want to use your outdoor space, so I can recommend the right design service for you. Whether you're considering a simple planting refresh or a complete transformation, it gives us a clear and considered starting point.

The consultation also helps you decide on the right next step before you invest in a design or a build. Together we'll decide whether a full design is right for you, or whether a landscaper would be a better fit, with me coming in at the planting stage. Any landscaping costs would come from the landscaper's own quote, but after our consultation, you'll know exactly what to ask for.



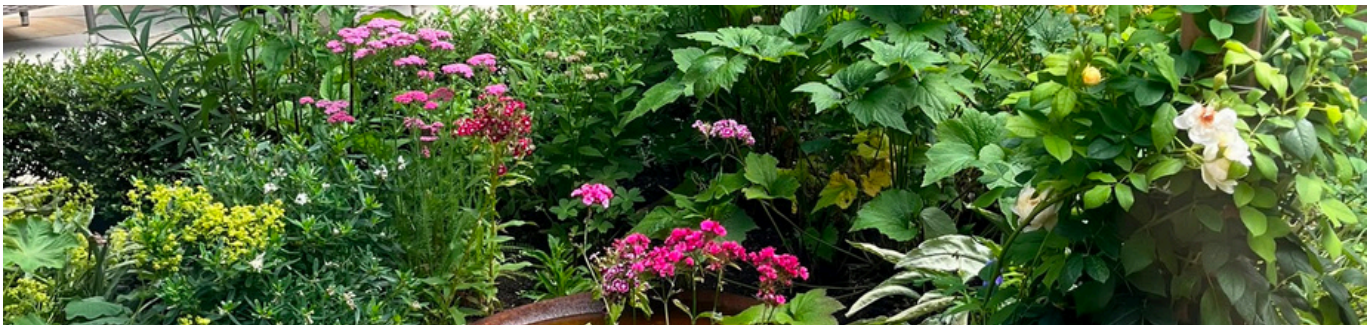
What to expect

We'll walk through your garden together, and I'll listen closely to what you tell me. We'll cover:

- What currently works well
- What isn't working for you
- How you'd like to use the space
- Maintenance expectations
- Style preferences and inspiration
- Opportunities and constraints within the garden

By the end of the consultation, you'll have a good sense of what your garden could become and how best to move forward.

The consultation also works as a stand-alone service, offering fresh ideas and professional guidance on your space.



Proposal and Design Recommendation

Within two weeks of our consultation, I'll send you a written proposal setting out the design service I'd recommend for your garden, the stages involved and my fee for each stage. You'll know exactly what my part involves, and what it costs, before you commit to anything.

Once you're happy to proceed, we'll schedule the 'Inspiration Visit' (more on this below), and I'll begin developing your design.

COMMISSION WITHIN FOUR WEEKS

Clients who commission their design within four weeks of their consultation are offered priority scheduling for their project start date.

Design Services

- Garden Refresh (Planting Design)
- Concept Design
- Full Garden Design

Your project at a glance

What's included in each design service

	Garden Refresh (Planting Design)	Concept Design†	Full Garden Design
Proposal and Design Recommendation	✓	✓	✓
Inspiration Visit & Design Brief	✓*	✓	✓
Understanding Your Garden: Site Survey and Analysis	✓	✓	✓
Mood Board Presentation	✓	✓	✓
Planting Design	✓	**Add-on**	✓
Concept Design	–	✓	✓
Detailed Design: The Masterplan	–	–	✓
Construction Details & Planting Plans	–	–	✓
Design Support During Construction	–	–	✓
Plant Order	✓	**Add-on**	✓
Planting & Garden Establishment	**Add-on**	**Add-on**	**Add-on**
Aftercare & Ongoing Support‡	**Add-on**	**Add-on**	**Add-on**

Add-on = available for an additional fee.

* *Sometimes combined with the consultation when we already have enough information, then expanded at the mood board stage.*

† *The later Full Garden Design stages can be added after a concept design. Each is priced separately and depends on my availability at the time.*

‡ *A six-month follow-up visit is included with every design that includes planting.*

Claire Durkan Garden Design | Living Well Outdoors

Inspiration Visit and Design Brief

This is where the ideas start to take shape as we dig deeper.

At an in-person meeting, we'll look at garden inspiration images and talk about what you like and don't like, how you want the garden to feel, and the atmosphere you'd like to create. Whether your vision is a family-friendly garden, a contemporary entertaining space, a wildlife haven, a relaxing retreat or ‘all of the above’, this conversation sets the direction of your project. It takes a couple of hours, although for planting design alone I may have enough information from the consultation to move straight to the mood board stage.

I may gently challenge a few assumptions along the way. A phrase such as 'I don't want roses, they're a lot of work' often turns out to be unfounded once we've talked through the different varieties and the work actually involved. For hard landscaping materials, we'll talk through the options, as each has advantages and disadvantages depending on how you want to use the garden and your budget.

We'll agree on a design brief that is personal to you, capturing your aims, priorities and budget.

Understanding Your Garden: Site Survey and Analysis

Every successful design begins with a thorough understanding of the space.

I carry out a detailed survey of your garden*, recording dimensions, levels, existing features, views, soil conditions, drainage, sunlight and anything you'd like to keep. Everything else in the design builds on this information, and it shows me the opportunities and challenges unique to your garden.

I measure the garden in person, taking notes and photos. Investing time in the site from the outset lets me create a design that is beautiful, practical, buildable and tailored to the way you want to live well outdoors. The survey takes around two hours, depending on the size of your garden and the level of detail reflects your chosen design service. You don’t need to be in, as long as I can access the garden.

*For complex sites (level changes, multiple existing features and trees) I will most likely recommend a topographical survey.



Mood Board Presentation

Bringing the vision to life.

Drawing on the Inspiration Visit, your design brief and the site survey, I create a mood board that captures the character and feel of your future garden, using carefully selected images, materials, textures, colours and planting inspiration.

This stage makes sure we're agreed on the look and feel of the garden before the design stage begins, so you can be confident the finished scheme will reflect your tastes and complement your home. I ask you to sign off the mood board before I move on to the next stage.

Garden Refresh (Planting Design)

Available as a standalone Garden Refresh (Planting Design) service, as part of a Full Garden Design, or as an add-on to Concept Design.

Planting with Purpose.

Using the mood board, site survey and analysis, I begin to develop a planting palette tailored to your garden's conditions, maintenance requirements and colour preferences.

Each plant is carefully positioned within a scaled planting plan. Plants are represented as circles, with their diameter indicating their mature spread, ensuring the planting scheme has sufficient space to develop and avoiding an overcrowded border after just a few seasons. Of course, plants are living things and growth rates vary depending on soil, aspect and growing conditions. That's where my knowledge of plant performance, positioning and suitability comes in.

Rather than aiming for an instant 'Chelsea Flower Show' border, the planting scheme is designed to mature gracefully, reaching its full potential over approximately three to five years. I typically combine trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs to create structure, texture and seasonal interest throughout the year.

Your planting package will include:

- ✓ A detailed planting plan
- ✓ Images of the selected plants
- ✓ A comprehensive plant schedule
- ✓ Plant order, placed with trusted nurseries
- ✓ A seasonal interest guide
- ✓ An aftercare advice sheet

Please note:

If you'd like help positioning and planting, or rejuvenating existing plants, this is available as an add-on.

For Full Garden Design projects, the planting design follows once the concept design has been approved.





Concept Design

Exploring the possibilities for your garden.

Available as a standalone service and as part of a Full Garden Design.

The concept design translates your design brief into a practical layout and overall vision. A 2D drawing shows how the different spaces in your garden could work together, with pathways, seating areas, planting areas, structures and key focal points brought into one cohesive plan. I'll also produce an elevation drawing and, in most cases, a 3D or angled overview of the design, which helps you picture the space.

This stage allows us to review ideas, discuss refinements and make sure the design delivers everything you want within your budget before moving on to detailed development (if you've chosen the full garden design package). One revision is included in your fee, such as changing the shape of an area you don't like, choosing a different material or changing a wall height. Further revisions are charged at my hourly rate.

Depending on the size and complexity of your garden and my other projects at the time, this stage may take one to two months. I'll give you a clearer idea when we reach it and keep you updated.

Please note that a concept plan doesn't include the detailed dimensions, specifications, drainage, levels or construction details needed for pricing and building.

It's an excellent option if you plan to develop your garden gradually, do some of the work yourself, or simply want a professional layout to guide future decisions. Think of it as a roadmap.

If after receiving your concept design you decide you'd like the detailed drawings after all, we can talk about adding the remaining Full Garden Design stages. Each stage is priced separately, and the timing will depend on my diary at the time, so I can't always promise an immediate start.

Note: it is important to understand that if you ask landscapers to quote solely from a concept plan:

- Quotes may vary significantly between contractors if they make different assumptions about materials, construction methods and specifications. Comparing quotes can therefore be difficult.
- Some contractors may be unwilling to provide a fixed quotation until further detail is available.
- Important elements such as levels, construction details, lighting layouts and exact material specifications may not yet be defined.
- There is a greater risk of unexpected costs arising during the build as decisions are made on site.

Detailed Design (Masterplan)

Part of the Full Garden Design service.

The blueprint for your garden transformation.

With the concept approved, I develop a detailed, scaled masterplan (sometimes called a working plan). It sets out the precise layout of your garden, with the measurements, levels and hard landscaping quantities, such as paving and walling, that a landscaper needs to build it.

Because every contractor prices from the same drawing, you can compare quotes like for like. The masterplan also becomes the central reference for contractors and suppliers throughout the build, so the finished garden reflects the agreed design.

When you're ready to seek quotes, I'm happy to suggest reputable local contractors where appropriate. The final choice is entirely yours, and personal recommendations are often invaluable.

Construction Details and Planting Plans

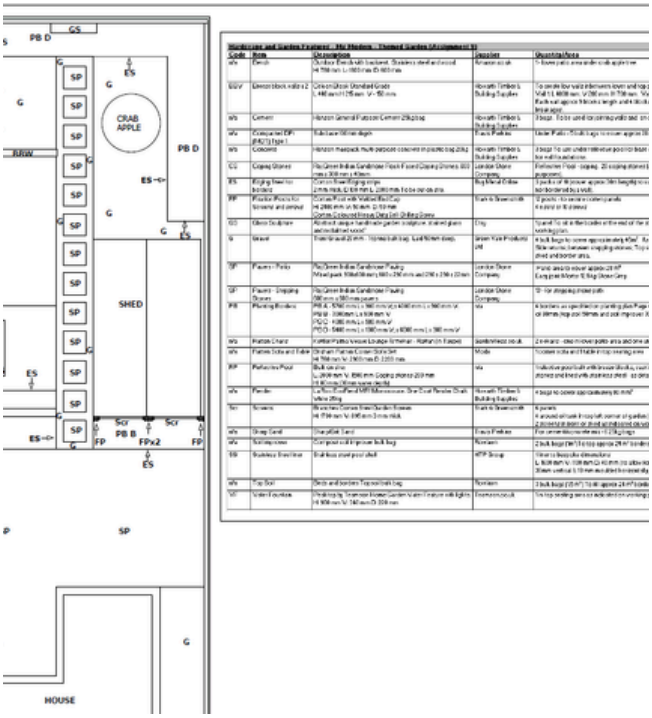
Part of the Full Garden Design service.

Turning design ideas into buildable reality.

Once you've chosen your contractor and confirmed the build date, I prepare any construction drawings they need and issue them in good time before work begins. These give detailed guidance for bespoke features such as patios, walls, steps, pergolas and water features.

Features such as lighting schemes, irrigation systems and bespoke construction details are priced separately within the proposal, so the overall fee reflects the scope and complexity of your design. You'll see these costs from the start and can make informed choices. Please don't feel constrained by budget at the concept stage, though, as there are often creative, cost-effective ways to achieve the same vision without bespoke elements.

Your planting plan follows the approach described in Planting Design above, and shows the exact plants, quantities and positions for the approved design, chosen for year-round structure, colour and seasonal interest.



Design Support During Construction

Part of the Full Garden Design service.

Peace of mind throughout the build.

Your landscaper will work from the construction drawings, and in most cases these answer any questions that come up during the build. Every garden is different, though. Unforeseen site conditions sometimes appear once work begins, or small adjustments are needed for practical reasons.

A brief conversation, a clarified drawing or a short site visit can often settle these quickly and keep the original design intent intact.

My aim is to provide the right level of involvement so the build runs smoothly and the finished garden reflects the approved design.

We'll talk through how much support you'd like during construction. Some clients prefer scheduled site visits at key stages, while others are happy for me to be on hand as and when needed. For example, three visits might cover:

- The first day of the build
- Marking out the design with the landscapers
- A snagging visit towards the end, to check the finishing details

This can be built into your proposal from the outset, or arranged later in the project if you'd prefer to decide once a contractor has been appointed.

Planting and Garden Establishment

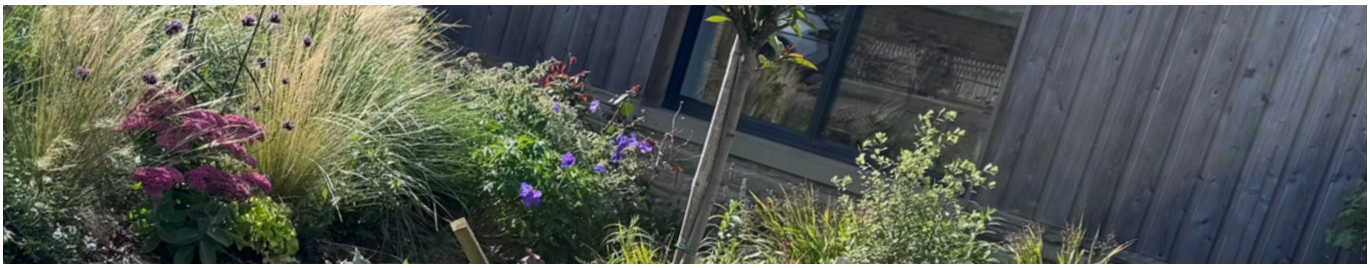
Available as an add-on to all three design services.

The stage where your garden truly comes to life.

I source plants from nurseries I know and trust, in line with the agreed planting schedule and order to arrive once any landscaping is completed. For feature trees, I may visit specialist nurseries to select a specimen with the character and impact the design calls for. I can also source finishing touches such as statement pots, water features and outdoor furniture that complement the design.

Once the plants arrive on site, careful positioning with reference to the planting plan gives each one the best chance to thrive while delivering the intended look. You may prefer to place and plant them yourself using the detailed planting plan, particularly if you're keen to develop your gardening knowledge and be closely involved in creating the garden. Alternatively, we can position and plant together, with extra guidance if you're new to gardening or simply value a helping hand.

The result is a planting scheme that settles naturally into its surroundings, creating a garden that feels balanced, connected and full of character. As it matures, the planting weaves the garden into the wider landscape, supporting wildlife, adding seasonal interest and creating a beautiful space for living well outdoors.





Aftercare and Ongoing Support

Available as an add-on to all three design services.

Helping your new garden flourish.

A newly planted garden keeps developing over time. To help you get the best from it, I can offer ongoing guidance and tailored aftercare advice as it establishes.

You might like occasional visits, seasonal recommendations or practical maintenance guidance. You may be new to gardening and keen to learn, or an experienced gardener who would simply value a review visit after a few months. Or you may need help finding a gardener to provide ongoing care. We can talk through what suits you as the garden nears completion, or you may already know from the outset the level of support you'd like.

One of my favourite parts of the design process is returning to see a finished garden being enjoyed. Every design that includes planting comes with a follow-up visit around six months after planting, to see how the garden has settled in and offer any guidance as it establishes. With your permission, I'd also love to return later to photograph established gardens, to show how a design has matured.

My hope is that your garden becomes a place you enjoy for years to come, close to nature and good for your wellbeing.

If you'd like to explore what's possible in your garden, I'd love to hear from you.
Get in touch to arrange your consultation.
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