

# HERE COMES THE SUN

## Using Arbors for Shade and Refuge

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**O**NE OF THE BEST PARTS of summer is getting outside into the garden so we can enjoy the fruits of our labor. We grow vegetables and flowers, plant trees for shade and windbreak and create seating areas to enjoy the company of family and friends. Connecting indoor and outdoor living dates back to ancient Egypt, where families planned homes and gardens at the same time, creating what is sometimes referred to as the garden house. Instead of viewing nature as a foe of man, Egyptians embraced the land adjacent to their homes as a place to raise animals, grow food and provide shelter. Adding an arbor, pergola or other sheltering structure to your garden can help expand the enjoyment of your private landscape to help create your own garden house. Let's look at some ways to fully inhabit your site both indoors and out.

### GET ORIENTED

Before choosing your arbor style and construction materials, decide where it should be built for maximum enjoyment. Putting an arbor where you'll use it goes beyond simply developing areas you've already cultivated. Do you crave a place to enjoy the morning paper and coffee, or prefer a quiet evening spot to unwind after a hard day? For respite from hot sun, create a retreat on the north side of the house with wide spacing between the overhead beams and shade-loving potted plants around the posts. If the summer sun beats down on the south side of your house,

heat and light while still keeping views to the stars open at night. If you have some great views not easily captured from inside your home, consider building your arbor further away from the house as a destination spot to capture more enjoyment and use of your land. Site the arbor near a large tree or boulders set deep into the soil to help anchor the structure to the site. This will help it to feel as though it belongs, instead of just having landed there haphazardly.

Some homes have an open space between the house and garage, which can easily be transformed into an accessible outdoor room with the addition of an arbor, offering welcome shelter from the weather when moving between buildings or doing outdoor chores. By completely enclosing this space with solid roofing to match the house, or attaching an arbor to both structures with generously sized beams you'll give your exterior an instant upgrade. This is a great place to add outdoor rugs, a few chairs and artwork on the walls to extend your garden's usefulness during a summer rain or otherwise inclement weather.

If backyard space is limited, a front entry arbor can capture space at the public side of your home and transform it into a semi-private garden room. Extend the front landing with an arbor overhead, making sure it is generously sized to



A partially shaded porch can be a place to enjoy coffee and the morning paper or unwind after the day.

and several people waiting at the door. This type of structure gives your home a welcoming first impression. If space allows, repeat a piece of the entry design at the street fence or off to the side with another freestanding pergola to give it impact. Again, pay attention to the orientation of the structure, knowing that everything does not have to be parallel to the street or house. If you decide to set a freestanding structure at an angle, first review and acknowledge exiting axis on the site and then repeat your angle with paving lines or bold planters to reinforce the location and orientation as a deliberate and fresh layout choice.

### THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE LANDSCAPE



Work with the landscape to create a well-loved outdoor area.

and location of outdoor structures. If your site is sloping, first it is important to ensure soil stability before any construction begins. Creating an outdoor room with an overhead arbor set into a hillside can be a dramatic choice that really inhabits the site by becoming part of the land. Be sure to retain the soil properly on the uphill side, creating a recessed area that hugs the back side of the arbor and gives the living space underneath an intimate feel. Confirm your height by setting stakes at the desired spot beforehand to ensure you are not blocking views from your house or your neighbors.



with. Just as we feel comfortable sitting on a deck or walking on a boardwalk above the land, enjoying your garden from just a few inches above can offer a refreshing alternative to ground level living.

## MATERIALS AND SCALE

The scale of your arbor will depend on what you plan to do with it. Large gatherings with barbecuing and dining should allow at least fifteen feet or so under the arbor, with about eight and a half feet of height, with your ideal size dependant on the scale and amount of furnishings you are planning. If you are adding a side yard arbor for a semi-private space off of a bedroom or office, eight feet of space underneath should suffice, taking care to adhere to city setbacks if they apply. Smaller structures with just enough room for a garden bench need only be four to six feet wide. The next time you find yourself enjoying an outdoor area, take a moment to make a mental note of the general scale of the space and why you think it is appealing. A designer that is adept at space planning can

Consider the use of an area when

Consider how you will access the arbor as part of the initial layout so it is easy to use; don't make the mistake of building a beautiful destination that sits unused because it is perceived as hard or dangerous to reach.

Alternately, raising your arbor above the natural grade can be just as dramatic if you have a flat landscape to work

appropriate finished size for your landscape.

Materials choices also have an effect on how the arbor interacts with the landscape and adjacent buildings. When in doubt, go bigger rather than smaller, allowing breathing room to move furniture around and add accessories as your design evolves. Match the roof angles and architectural detailing of your house, taking care to work in harmony with design elements already present.

Whether you choose an arbor to bring more formality to an area or need protection from the sun, adding an outdoor structure to your garden can bring the intimacy to wide open spaces that we all crave. You'll be amazed at how the character and circulation patterns will completely change in your garden when you carefully consider what



Err on the larger side and allow space to move around furniture and add accessories.

works best for your landscape. Site it, choose your design, select materials and start building to suit your lifestyle. Arbors are a great way to utilize forgotten corners of your garden without a house remodel, encouraging you to embrace more of your private outdoor world. ☺

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