

In brief

What Private garden in urban setting.

Points of interest The combination of delicate materials, such as zinc cladding, concrete curbstones and wooden walkways, makes a perfect setting for verdant green planting.

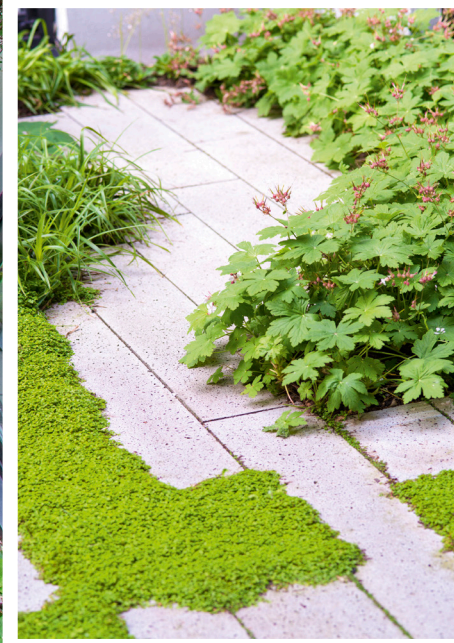
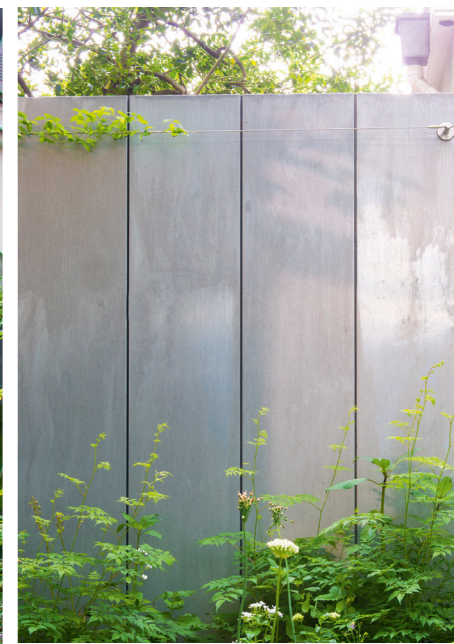
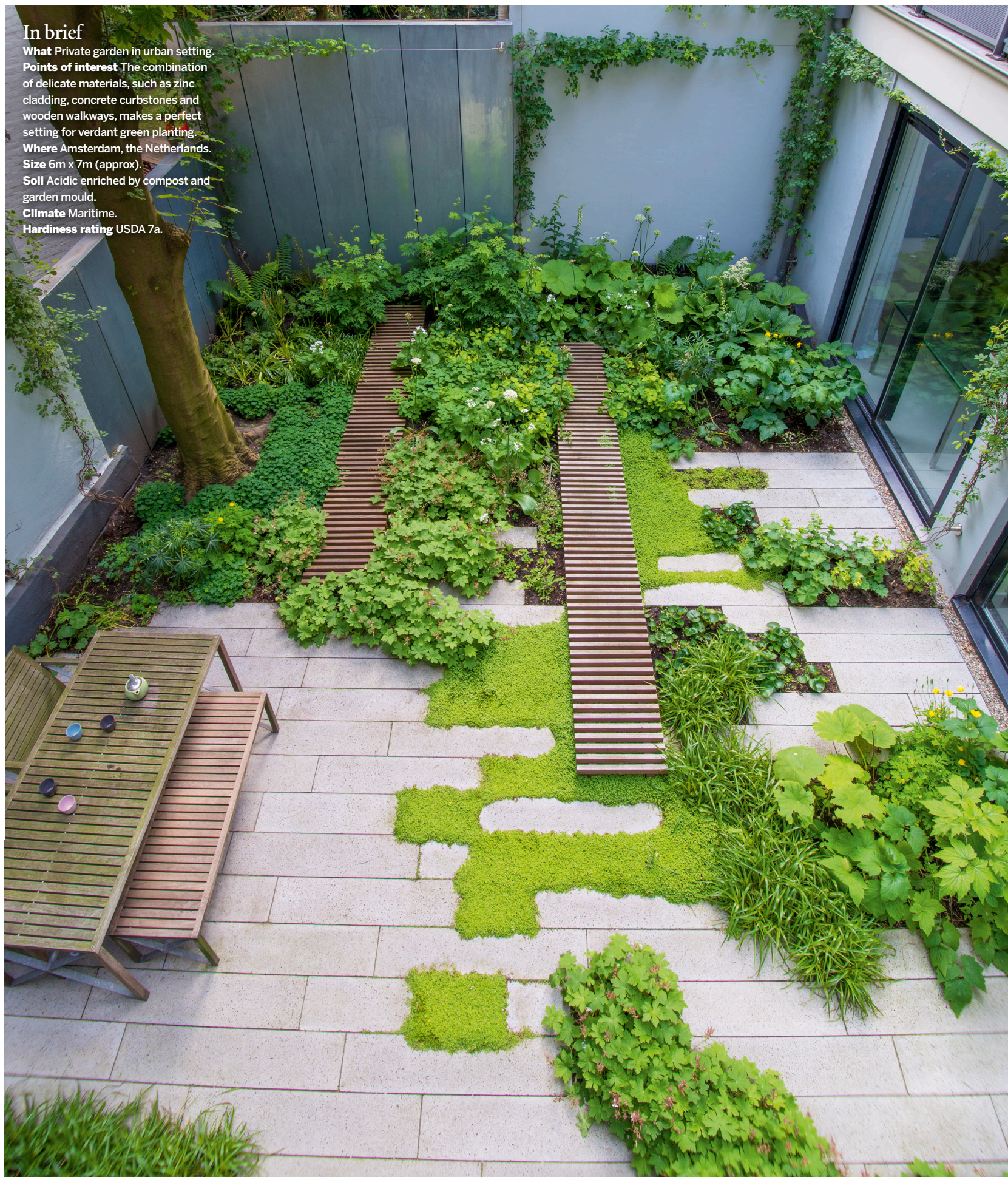
Where Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Size 6m x 7m (approx).

Soil Acidic enriched by compost and garden mould.

Climate Maritime.

Hardiness rating USDA 7a.



Making the most of a small space

Small gardens need big ideas: tall plants to tower above us, confident division of space and carefully selected materials. Designer Sarah Price takes a critical look at three designs to examine what elements can transform a tight urban space

WORDS SARAH PRICE PHOTOGRAPHS MAAYKE DE RIDDER/STEVEN WOOSTER

Garden 1 designed by Carolien Barkman

Subtle contradictions are at work here. Cool and stylish, the planting and hard landscaping are arranged according to a strict grid, playfully broken up by planting laid out like an unfinished Scrabble board. I can imagine myself as a child, hopping over the green carpets of *Soleirolia soleirolii* and skipping along the floating wooden walkways.

The five-storey apartment building and tall, existing *Acer pseudoplatanus* cast this garden in shade yet the blue-grey tones of the colour palette make the space appear larger and brighter than it really is. The cool tones of the concrete pavers, painted rendered walls and zinc cladding seamlessly blend with the fabric of the apartment, effectively offsetting the verdant green planting so that it takes centre stage. The zinc panels are a beautiful, sophisticated take on cladding, their soft sheen reflects light back into the space. They do not shout, instead they unify the space.

The thin hair line between each zinc panel is a further satisfying linear detail.

The balance between all the elements of the garden is perfect. Wood introduces warmth into the space. The slatted garden furniture and floating wooden walkways add depth to the garden composition. The walkways are placed 20cm above ground level and the slats are spaced to allow glimpses of *Soleirolia soleirolii* and *Asarum europaeum* growing beneath. Such detail is everywhere. The concrete curbstones have an organic, pitted texture that contrast with alternating rectangles of low evergreens: *Luzula sylvatica*, *Saxifraga x urbium* and the semi-evergreen *Geranium macrorrhizum* 'Spessart'. This variation of leaf form is extended across the garden from the delicate clover-like leaves of *Oxalis acetosella* var. *rosea*, thriving beneath the acer, to the bold, paddle-like leaves of *Astilboides tabularis*.

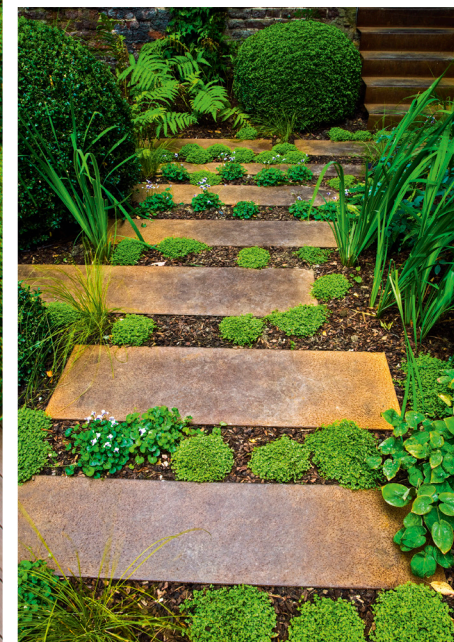
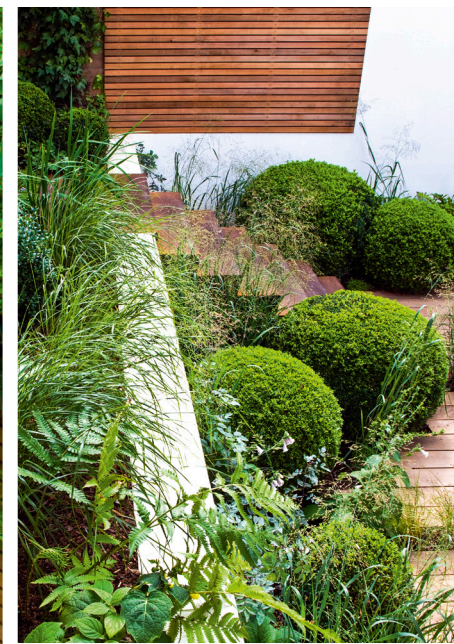
Key elements of the design

- 1 Zinc cladding softly reflects light into the shady space.** Cladding is invaluable for hiding ugly boundaries and structures, and needn't be expensive. Salvaged wood cladding is very on trend.
- 2 The imaginative composition of plants and hard materials creates a year-round picture.** The dimensions of the paving units dictate the ground pattern and set up a play of repetition across the space. This geometry is reflected in the proportions and lines of the wooden walkways, furniture and panelled cladding.
- 3 Textural contrast in plant forms.** A careful selection of shade-loving plants creates a green picture throughout the year. Fine-leaved tussock grasses contrast with the heart-shaped leaves of *Epimedium grandiflorum* 'Album' and graceful ferns, such as *Polystichum setiferum*. *Aruncus* 'Horatio', *Lunaria annua* var. *albiflora*, *Meconopsis cambrica* complete the green picture, while bulbs *Allium nigrum* and *Nectaroscordum siculum* subsp. *bulgaricum* bring further highlights.



In brief

What Low-maintenance private garden in urban setting.
Points of interest Detailing of hard materials, including 'folded' Corten steps and lengths of decking and Corten 'stepping stones' that have been staggered to create varied planting depths.
Where Kensington, west London.
Size 9m x 10m (approx).
Soil Improved London clay.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness rating USDA 9a.



Garden 2 designed by Sarah Price

Excavating and removing earth is never an easy operation, especially in London gardens where access is difficult. However, bold moves can make a space, and when accepting this 2008 commission, I knew that the success of this garden depended on excavating the upper ground level away from the house. This not only let light into the downstairs interior but also created space for a seating area to step out directly on to and enjoy.

The connection between inside and out was enhanced by introducing large glass windows and doors that look out on to the garden. A large portion of the budget was spent on creating a set of sculptural, Corten steel steps to bridge the different garden levels. The folded form of the steps appear to float above the box domes, which in time will merge and form abstract cloud-like forms, a counterpoint to the sharp angles of the garden. The evergreen and ever adaptable grass *Anemanthele lessoniana* intersperses the box, providing strong contrast in form and arching habit. The staggered lines of the

Corten stepping stones encourage you to pick your way through the planting. They lead to a rectangle of lawn, edged in Corten steel and raised slightly above the surrounding planting. The uniform texture of the mown grass, emphasise the beautiful form and shadows of the existing Magnolia tree.

Not all designs are fully realised, every designer runs the risk of their design plans not being fully implemented. In this case the retaining wall was rendered a stark white and not limewashed in a muted tone as specified, and this somewhat harsh approach was also adopted for random sections of the old London brick walls. As an alternative, sensitive repointing in lime mortar and a green matrix of climbers would have been a more sympathetic approach to the overall scheme.

ROSE READER EVENT

Sarah Price will be discussing her planting style at the GARDENS ILLUSTRATED Festival in April. For details see page 8 or visit gardensfestival.com

Key elements of the design

- 1 A seamless transition from inside to out** was enhanced by matching the decking to the width, direction and floor level of the interior floorboards.
- 2 The lengths of the decking boards** were varied to create a staggered boundary to the planting area. This breaks up the visual impact of the dominant retaining wall and allows pockets of deep planting to create the illusion of greater space.
- 3 Limit material selection.** The rusty orange patina of Corten steel was chosen to complement the warm tones of the old London brick along the back boundary. It is also a striking partner to fresh green planting. Choose a dominant material and repeat it across the space to integrate.
- 4 A restrained planting palette** will unify a small garden. The evergreen matrix of *Buxus* and *Anemanthele lessoniana* is interplanted with *Tulipa*, *Narcissus*, *Hesperis*, *Helleborus* and *Digitalis* for spring interest. These are tough plants that won't mind too much if they are shaded out later in the year. The annual tobacco plant, *Nicotiana sylvestris* adds scent, height and visual drama through summer into autumn. Live-fast-die-young annuals work hard in small town gardens, where you can plant them en masse to great effect.



In brief
What Low-maintenance private garden in a residential area.
Points of interest A canal-view garden where the austere design is contrasted with a restful, silver-green planting palette. Balanced, co-ordinated planting provides year-long interest.
Where Amstelveen, the Netherlands.
Size 6m x16m (approx).
Soil Sand and peat.
Climate Mild maritime.
Hardiness rating USDA 7a.



Garden 3 designed by Luc Englehard

It is easy to imagine sitting on the canalside deck in this garden, enjoying the play of dappled light through the trees and on to the water. It is a restrained garden space, confidently designed so that the focus is always on the borrowed view of the canal. The rest of the garden is relatively static, with low-maintenance plants and materials that act as a counterpoint to the changing play of light on the water.

The unusual, angular composition of this design makes the most of a narrow space and the borrowed view of the canal. The diagonal lines of the paving pull you towards the canal in a slow, meandering fashion. Subtle changes of direction are always an effective design play, especially in a narrow garden where it will create the illusion of greater space. You never want a direct route that will allow you to rush to the end of the

garden without pausing to indulge your senses. The level changes down from the house to the canalside further this sense of journey and the illusion of space.

Low-maintenance planting is dominated by evergreen *Pachysandra terminalis* 'Green Carpet', which is a perfect candidate for carpeting bare areas of earth and this, together with *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Munstead', forms a low, horizontal contrast to the slender upright accent of a Japanese crab apple, *Malus toringo*. This is a small tree at maturity making it perfect for a small space. It's also a clever choice for a canalside garden, as it has a pendulous-shaped crown that echoes waterside trees, such as weeping willow. Here, it has been artfully positioned to both partially screen and frame the waterside view, adding a sense of discovery to your journey through the garden. □

Key elements of the design

- 1 Make the most of an attractive 'borrowed view'** by composing your garden as you would a picture. Frame the beautiful form of a mature tree in the distance with a simply placed tree or an informal, staggered line of shrubs that will direct your eye to the view. Sensitive pruning of existing trees and shrubs is often effective in opening and framing views.
- 2 Change levels within a small garden.** A simple step down or up to a raised area, such as a deck, within your garden will create a greater sense of space.
- 3 Consider the route that you will take through the space.** Avoid creating direct routes in a small garden. By running sections of paving directly up to your boundary walls you will make your garden feel wider. Position a multi-stem tree or tall, semi-transparent grasses to partially veil the garden's view. This will create an even greater illusion of space.
- 4 Boundaries make or break a small garden.** Keep them simple and uniform. Hornbeam hedging along the two boundary lengths of the garden creates a calm, green frame.
- 5 The mix of hard materials** in this space makes a break – but only just successfully – with the standard design rule of limiting your material palette to two or three materials that work to unify a space. The blue tones of the concrete tiles and Belgian blue stone setts tonally merge as does the warmth of the Corten 'floating steps' and wooden decking.