

LANDSCAPING A SLOPING SITE

Our self-build home is on a sloping site and we'd like to landscape our garden to embrace it. How do we design a sloping site so that it's usable?

A One of the advantages of a sloping garden is that changes in levels can result in some stylish design choices which can add wow factor. Most sloped gardens use a series of terraces to break up the space and provide level spaces on which to plant and create a variety of areas for entertaining and relaxing. Sunken seating can provide shelter from which your garden can be appreciated from a different perspective, a view looking through foliage at a low angle, for example. At the other end of the scale, slopes with a steep gradient can give you a sweeping view of either the landscape beyond the garden, be it urban or rural, which can add drama and a sense of scale that is hard to compete with.

Terraces are constructed using retaining walls, and these that can be built using a variety of different materials. You might be surprised how much your choice here can directly influence the mood and intimacy of the garden — rough boulders will give a wild Mediterranean feel, while smooth glossy concrete will work as a nod to classic urban chic. If you can, try to steer clear of timber, as this has a limited lifespan

and the investment doesn't really have the same return as the hard landscaping choices on offer.

If your slope is extreme, include some double-height drops from terrace to terrace with vertical rills (shallow channels of water) gently flowing down the levels. Another good idea is to plant solitary trees and illuminate them like sculptures to add real drama and impact.

CHOOSING PLANTS AND LIGHTING

One of the benefits of a sloping garden is using foliage and the form of plants to create a tapestry of textures. I like to mix forms, from open habit [less dense] trees such as *Betula* to North American *Cornus*, which has good compact flowers and autumn colour. Many herbaceous perennials enjoy open sites like slopes so choose plants such as *Eupatorium*, *Helenium* and *Aster* which will give a long period of flower but require little maintenance.

The main consideration is that slopes are often more climatically exposed so select plants that are durable. If you are unsure, speak to a good independent grower or nursery who can assist your plant selection.

Lighting across a sloping garden is of course crucial. Steps and walkways need to be subtly lit to reduce the risks of trips and slips, so consider both uplighting specimens and trees as well as under

lighting steps and slopes so that you are confident using the garden on all levels.

CREATING GOOD ACCESS

Gardens created on terraces will require good access. If you have steep slopes then in general steps are your only choice — remember the shallower the rise the more comfortable the steps are to navigate. Steep steps are hard work and doubly so with garden machinery and tools, let alone a tray with a cup of tea and a magazine. Good handrails which are discreet but sturdy are therefore wise to include.

On shallower slopes it is possible to traverse space to space using sloping walkways. These should be made out of textured paving but remember, glossy slick modern paving is very slippery when wet and, like loose aggregates which will move underfoot, neither inspire confidence when going up or down hill.

As a design trick, and if space allows, consider making paths which traverse the slope from the furthest points. Not only will the gradient be less and easier to walk up and down but the garden will also seem bigger.

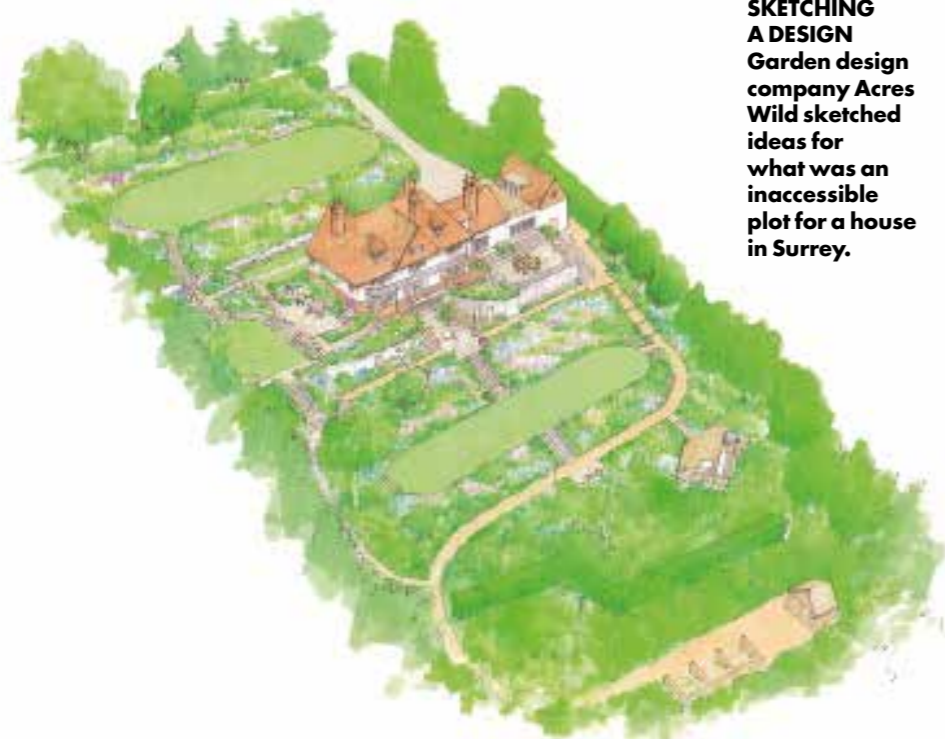
STRUCTURAL WORK WILL IMPACT COSTS

The cost of installing terraces can vary enormously, simply based on the scale of the work involved and the volume of materials that will need to be imported. Some work will become structural in scale and require an engineer or landscape architect to design in a watershed across the site and to manage the structural requirements of walls, to retain the volume of material both behind and on top of them. Major works like this are going to be expensive, so find a designer you can work with who has experience, and make sure you have three quotes from contractors for the work plus guarantees for the work.

DESIGN IN SUFFICIENT DRAINAGE

If you are dealing with a site where water will collect then there are a number of things you really need to do and the action you take will largely depend on the location of your house.

SKETCHING A DESIGN
Garden design company **Acres Wild** sketched ideas for what was an inaccessible plot for a house in Surrey.



USABLE SPACES
The steep levels in this previously inaccessible sloping garden designed by **Acres Wild** are now linked by winding paths and flights of steps. To manage costs, reduce the environmental impact and soften the garden, banks were planted rather than retained with expensive walls.

If your site runs uphill from your house, which means water collects near it, then you will need to install some form of SuDS system which slows the water flow running downhill during heavy rain. You should also build in 'once in a lifetime' flood defences such as a raised wall around the house with sluice gates which can be installed. This will offer a degree of protection from flooding. Consider also where the water running off the roof will go.

If the water collection point and your home are not in the same location then it is slightly easier. Water run-off from the roof and the watershed across the site

can be slowed using a series of SuDS, semi-dry stream beds which collect and slow water, allowing it to leach into the surrounding soil slowly. If space does not allow then consider water collection systems and really keep an eye on the communal infrastructure which services your neighbourhood, to ensure water can leave without obstructions.

Remember that the more paved areas you have the more of an issue water run-off will be for a sloped garden, so plan carefully and incorporate semi-permeable solutions as a matter of course.

Paul Hervey-Brookes

KITCHEN: HOT TAPS

I want to fit a hot water tap in my kitchen. Is it best to pair it with a ceramic sink or can I pair it with any sink material?

A To ensure optimal compatibility with a hot water tap, it is best to consider the sink's specification and its heat and scratch resistance capabilities. Check that the sink is heat resistant up to 180° degrees, as this will ensure safe usage with a hot water tap and allow for hot kitchen equipment such as a saucepan to be left on the surface without damaging the sink's finish.

We suggest the most suitable sinks would be those made from either high-quality stainless steel or composite mixes such as 80% quartz mixed with acrylic resin. As well as being extremely durable and an ideal pairing with a hot water tap, a stainless-steel sink will offer you a traditional aesthetic that is common in most households. Stainless-steel sinks are also easy to come by at a range of different prices, styles and sizes, with something suitable for every kitchen.

Composite sinks are also known for their superlative durability and functionality and make a perfect choice for those desiring a more modern, luxurious and statement look in their kitchen.

Elina Enqvist-Twomey

