

YOUR FRONT GARDEN DESIGN GUIDE

Save It Don't Pave it!



FRONT GARDEN DESIGN GUIDE

Front gardens of all sizes affect how our roads look in the streetscape; where rainwater drains to; and our local wildlife biodiversity. They can help tackle Climate Change and, by creating a more attractive environment, enhance our quality of life. Improving health and wellbeing and addressing the Climate Emergency are priorities in the Council Plan 2025-25 and greening our streetscapes and neighbourhoods is key to achieving the ambition of a greener city.

Some interesting facts:

- Domestic gardens make up nearly half of the UK's urban green space.
- They contain four out of five of the trees in our towns and cities, and thereby provide a key element of our green infrastructure.

With few planning controls to prevent the loss of our front gardens to hard landscaping, this guidance uncovers the potential problems caused by the loss of so many of our gardens in the hope that it will encourage greener design solutions, where attractive planting and parking can be combined. It is also expected that greener designs can also be incorporated in new housing developments.

The hard surfacing of front gardens for parking and reduced maintenance is increasingly popular, with over a quarter of front gardens now completely paved. *Source: Royal Horticultural Society (RHS).*



Traditional paving stones, concrete and tarmac do not allow water to drain through and can cause problems with flooding at the property, for neighbouring houses and the street.

Paving over of front gardens does not need planning permission, providing porous paving is used or there is run off to a permeable/porous part of the garden. But planning permission is required for traditional paving of an area bigger than 5 square metres that does not provide for the water to run to a permeable area like a lawn or border <https://publicaccess.leeds.gov.uk/online-applications/>. If vehicular access from a highway is needed, an application must be made for a 'dropped kerb' as it is illegal to build a crossing over a public footpath without council consent. The council will also require the kerb to be built to specific standards and must approve its construction.

This comes under Class F of the General Permitted Development Order which states:

F.2 Development is permitted by Class F subject to the condition that where—

- a. the hard surface would be situated on land between a wall forming the principal elevation of the dwellinghouse and a highway, and*
- b. the area of ground covered by the hard surface, or the area of hard surface replaced, would exceed 5 square metres,*

either the hard surface is made of porous materials, or provision is made to direct run-off water from the hard surface to a permeable or porous area or surface within the curtilage of the dwellinghouse

Definition of permeable: using gravel or green, vegetated areas; directing water from an impermeable surface to a soakaway or border; using permeable block paving, porous asphalt or concrete

Permeable hard surfacing like gravel, permeable block paving and porous asphalt of any size does not require planning permission because rainwater will be able to drain through it naturally. However, keeping hard surfacing to a minimum will leave space for plants which can provide homes and food for wildlife, as well as being visually attractive and providing a green buffer to polluting roads.



Allowing space for parking on a permeable gravel surface with lots of plants in the gaps



RHS Demonstration Garden at Hampton Court Flower Show



Even the smallest space can be green and inviting, while providing room for a car or two.

A few top tips:

■ **Use a hedge instead of a fence**

Hedges can help protect the front garden from pollution and provide a home for wildlife. There are lots of low maintenance species like dark green Yew and Beech. Or choose something more colourful with berries like Berberis with the added benefit of providing a thorny hedge for security.



■ **Plant under cars**

If cars are frequently out for the day, low-growing plants that don't mind occasional knocks can be planted between the wheel tracks. Try Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*); Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) and Thymes such as *Thymus serpyllum*. There are plants that thrive in the driest places and these are perfect choices in narrow strips.



Roundhay Eco-house planted with thyme



RHS Harlow Carr demonstration garden with cycle shed

■ **Container garden or Raised Vegetable planters**

Pots can be placed anywhere, allowing plants to be grown in areas of the front garden that don't have soil. Choose plants that support pollinators for added biodiversity value such as Catmint (*Nepeta*), Wild marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*) and Geraniums. Raised planters can provide a productive growing garden.



■ A CHOICE OF PAVING MATERIALS:

Paving over your front garden affects far more than the environment on your doorstep.

But it is possible to avoid some of the most damaging effects:

If you want to pave your front garden, choose a permeable surface, which allows rainwater to soak away into the ground. These include:

- Gravel (but avoid adjacent to roads and pavements where loose stones can create a hazard)
- Permeable block paving (shaped with 'notches' to aid water runoff)
- Porous poured surfaces (asphalt, resin-bound gravel)

■ FRONT GARDENS IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS:

This guidance is applicable to new housing developments, to ensure that front gardens are designed alongside the same principles as existing housing. Although the green inspiration of the showhome's front garden is often not replicated in the houses for sale, it clearly shows that the housebuilder knows what will attract a potential buyer.



The showhome



The reality

Retention of existing trees within new gardens adds a sense of establishment and maturity to any new development. They can make a significant contribution to Sustainable Placemaking and assist in integrating any new development into its surroundings. In light of the LCC Climate Change Emergency, declared in 2019, existing trees are now being valued in terms of their Carbon storage and their year-on-year carbon sequestration. This is in addition to public amenity and bio-diversity value, and also in terms of their contribution to air quality/ pollution.

In comparison, new tree planting offers little visually or environmentally (in the sense of carbon capture) for at least 20-30 years. A large mature tree can absorb and store in the region of 3.5 tonnes of Co2. Cutting one down releases the Co2 back into the atmosphere. Priority must therefore be given to retaining existing trees in a sustainable manner. Leeds University has estimated that trees across Leeds (exclusive of woodlands) took up the equivalent of 1% of the region's CO2 emissions in 2018. <https://leaf.leeds.ac.uk/news/i-tree-leeds-putting-a-value-on-the-citys-trees/>

But clearly we need new trees too, to replace ones that have come to the end of their life and to assist with mitigating the effects of climate change. But these could be smaller garden trees that have an important role in absorbing excess water and provide shade. Fruit trees are also a good addition to a front garden and have the benefit of attractive Springtime blossom.

Although, as previously stated, we do not have a Local Plan policy on the use of porous paving in front gardens, we do have the Natural Resources and Waste Local Plan:

<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Adopted%20Consolidated%20NRWLP%20Inc%20Policies%20Mins%202013-14.pdf>

This states that permeable surfacing should be used for all extensive areas of hard standing (including car parks).

When the Council is dealing with applications for new housing development we apply **Policy Water 7: Surface Water Run-Off**, of the Natural Resources and Waste Local Plan, to reduce the speed of surface water run off through the use of sustainable drainage wherever possible, including use of porous surfacing.

The Policy states:

WATER 7: SURFACE WATER RUN-OFF

All developments are required to ensure no increase in the rate of surface water run-off to the existing formal drainage system. Development will be expected to incorporate sustainable drainage techniques wherever possible.

- On previously developed sites peak flow rates must be reduced by at least 30%
- On sites which have not previously been connected to the drainage infrastructure, or watercourse, surface water run off rates will not exceed the 'greenfield' run-off rate (i.e. the rate at which water flows over land which has not previously been developed).

■ CONSERVATION AREAS:

These are areas of 'special architectural or historic interest' which the council have named so they can be 'preserved or enhanced' (there are currently 26 Conservation Areas in Leeds). Many are streets with buildings of a particular style and age, often with mature street trees and defined boundaries. Protecting existing trees and adding new ones contributes to retaining the special character of these areas, as does the retention of hedges and walls alongside the street as these relate to the style and period of the houses. The special character will be lost if front gardens

and boundaries are removed. In Conservation Areas is particularly important to retain the original hard landscaping materials and use a sympathetic style.



■ GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE:

Urban front gardens of all sizes support a substantial range of wildlife including birds, butterflies, bees and hedgehogs, collectively making up a matrix of interlinked spaces for wildlife. Without trees and plants, there are fewer places for birds to nest and less feeding opportunity for pollinating insects and mammals. Some animal species are now more common in towns than in rural areas and gardens increasingly provide urban residents with our only close encounters with the natural world. Habitat structures such as log and stone piles and bug hotels can be integrated into constructed elements or located in a quiet corner.



Keep your garden green

More and more of us are choosing to pave over our front gardens or swap natural grass for plastic grass (artificial turf). Let nature be nature by sticking to natural grass and avoid cutting down trees and hedges. Not only will wildlife love you for it, you'll also reduce your risk of flash flooding. [Click here for find more tips about gardening for wildlife.](#)

LCC's Climate Emergency newsletter of 6/10/20 highlighted the paving of front gardens and the benefits to wildlife in retaining greenery

The Leeds by Example website also has some useful information on biodiversity: <https://www.leedsbyexample.co.uk/biodiversity>

■ FURTHER INFORMATION

The Royal Horticultural Society has investigated the importance of our front gardens in their 'Front Gardens' guide

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/pdf/Gardening-matters-Front-Gardens-urban-greening.pdf>

Introducing pollinator friendly plants and permeable paving will give wildlife a home and reduce flood risk. A planted boundary will also absorb air pollutants from adjoining roads through the leaves of a hedge, thereby improving the air quality in our homes. The Royal Horticultural Society has advice on designing front gardens and which plants to choose.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=879>

More information on the problems of paving over front gardens and design solutions is available on the RHS website www.rhs.org.uk/ggb



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