

Let your Garden become part of your interior space

Guest columnist, architect JUDE TUGMAN, answers your queries about home improvement

Q My husband and I are garden lovers and spend a lot of time gardening but we don't have anywhere inside we can sit and enjoy the fruits of our labours. What do you suggest?

A As a garden lover, too, I can completely understand your problem. It has always seemed baffling to me how a nation of garden lovers has such traditionally inward looking homes.

The first solution we were offered to make us feel more "in the garden" was the conservatory extension. These may have plenty of glass but most of it starts 70cm of the floor, so when it comes to a relaxing moment all you can see is trees, tops of bushes and sky!

Conservatory extensions can work very well but they are generally attached, often quite clumsily, to houses rather than made an integral part of the home, so my advice is extend your home in a way that enhances the flow of space from inside to out and vice-versa.

This is best done with large areas of openable glazing, such as big sliding glass doors, but also by

making the ground level outside the same as the floor level inside. This encourages the sense of a free-flowing space, especially if the flooring used inside is carried through to the outside.

If you want to maximise the feeling of being outside when you are in then you need expanses of glazing with floor-to-ceiling windows.

However, glazing can have a reasonably expensive price tag and you would expect to pay about £30,000 for a standard rear extension. Full-height windows and sliding doors would probably increase the budget by at least £5,000.

It is important to be aware of recent changes to the building regulations, particularly the complexities of Part L of the Building Regulations that has put restrictions on the amount of glazing you are allowed, as an attempt to improve thermal efficiency.

With large areas of glazing, therefore, an SAP (Standard Assessment of Procedure) calculation is often required to prove the overall thermal efficiency of your home is still within the official parameters.

Q I've just bought my daughter a tiny studio flat while she's at university. How can she maximise the space with a very small budget?

A First, I would recommend that even though the space is small you need to dedicate a significant amount to storage. One of the key elements to making a room feel spacious is ensuring you have a place for everything.

Beds are an obvious space guzzler and don't need to be out all the time, so consider an inexpensive sofa-bed, or a pull-down wall-mounted bed. These sometimes come with integrated shelves and cupboards.

Alternatively, if you have a generous ceiling height you could build a mezzanine level, with a simple ladder access, to create a bed area. If your ceiling height is not particularly high you can still lift the bed off the floor by building a 1.5m high platform. You can then build shelves underneath. This would cost about £2,000.

Leave the room as open as possible rather than dividing it into separate areas – let the kitchen space flow into the living space. The only area I would separate is the bathroom, but this can be kept reasonably small by having a shower in a wet-room.

By not specifically defining one space from another you are getting maximum flexibility out of the flat by utilising the whole space at any one time.

The interior finishes are also very important, so keep things simple. Use light, neutral colours since they give maximum reflection, and patterns can make a space feel crowded. However, it does not have to be a stark white. A subtle depth and interest can be achieved by painting walls different shades of white – it's amazing how many shades of white are out there now.

Obviously, furniture also has a major impact on a room, don't go for anything too large. Extendable tables are great space savers and folding chairs are ideal.

Finally, because your flat is a multifunctional space, you need to make sure you have some flexibility in the way you can light it. This may be as simple as installing a dimmer switch, or you can have different lights on separate switches.

Being able to adjust the lighting means you can change the mood of the space and so enjoy it as it responds to your different needs during the day.

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