



1 WHERE PARKING MEANS BUSINESS

This is a good example of how to make a large concrete surface look less like concrete. It's the parking area of a business park that had the foresight to work with the landscape architect, Bettina Jaugstetter, who added plants to soften the inevitable brutalism. In doing so, she has made the space welcoming and beautiful. There are many places we all know that would benefit from such vision.

CLAIRE TAKACS

PARKING

Designing a parking space may not be the most glamorous job in the world, but look on it as a way of extending your garden and it takes on a whole new dimension

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR

May I share with you some of the things that annoy me? This is not, I promise, a long list, as I am generally quite a tolerant fellow. I will limit myself to three things: first, large men with small wheeled suitcases (why do they not just pick them up and avoid the ire of all those people whom they trip up?); second, people on trains or planes who hog the entire armrest; and finally, those who park their cars so that they ruin a view. You glance out of the sitting room window expecting your cares to be rinsed away by the cheering sight of the roses in full bloom and instead find yourself looking at the muddy bonnet of a Landrover Discovery. If you're really unlucky, you may even be able to make out a half-empty packet of Haribos or an old Kleenex on the dashboard. People must park, of course, but please, please, please try not to do so in front of the windows.

This state of affairs cannot be blamed on the guest parker – they are just coming to visit and park wherever seems convenient. It is your fault as resident 'parkee', I'm afraid, or at least the fault of your garden design. Gardens are not just about plant combinations, scent and prettily scattered containers, but also about more practical things, such as drains, bin stores and parking places. Dull, I know, but really important, because if your garden does not actually function, then no matter how numerous or how divine your herbaceous borders they will not make it any better.

I also realise that for most people there is often only one place to park and that is in the front garden. There are countless houses built with neat little front gardens intended for a scattering of plants to welcome visitors and amuse the postman. But one of the conveniences of modern living is the motor car, and front gardens have, in many cases, become prized parking spots away from the interferences of traffic wardens and passing vandals.

This is unsurprising, but the temptation to concrete the whole thing should, ideally, be resisted. In reality, the amount of ground in contact with a stationary car is not much more than a square foot. Think about it – the only things touching the ground are the tyres. Admittedly, they have to get from street to parking spot, but that entails just a couple of narrow tracks. The rest of the area can still be garden or, at the very least, gravel, with plants or scattered containers and the odd climber. This will help alleviate flooding – not overtly, perhaps, but too much impermeable paving puts pressure on drainage systems, which, in turn, empty excess water into the rivers. That can result in people a bit further downstream having to bail out their sitting rooms, rush their soft furnishings upstairs and sit on the roof until they are rescued.



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When planning a parking area, you should take into consideration the number of cars that are likely to be in your drive at any one time. Do you have children about to pass their driving tests? Are you endlessly hosting diplomatic receptions or racy dinner parties? Can you get in and out of the car relatively easily? How big is your car? All of these things are important and must be thought through before you start. Also bear in mind that you do not want your guests having to park too far away; nobody wants to run a long way to the front door in the pouring rain while wearing impractical footwear.

Once you have allowed for all these things, you will have the remaining space in which to plant. The planting itself can be useful for steering guests where you want them to be. One of the best parking areas I ever designed contained only four varieties of plant (*Verbascum bombyciferum*, *Panicum virgatum*

'Heavy Metal', *Stipa tenuissima* and *Verbena bonariensis*) placed en masse straight into the gravel outside the house – no extra borders to weed. Nobody will ever knowingly run over a plant, so cars were manipulated gently into the desired parking spots. If space is tight, plant climbers or even low groundcover plants that will live happily beneath a parked car – thymes and scrambling herbs won't mind.

The RHS runs a marvellous campaign called Greening Grey Britain, which encourages people to grow plants wherever possible in towns and cities. Anyone can join in, so pull up a paving stone or dig up a bit of concrete in your front garden – it's better for you, better for wildlife and better for the world. □

NEXT MONTH Design that incorporates landforms.

USEFUL INFORMATION

I would usually use this section to recommend fabulous places for you to visit, but that's a bit tricky when it comes to car parks as opposed to, say, bridges or greenhouses. However, a couple of good examples of attractive parking spring to mind. I'm very fond of the National Trust car park at **Kynance Cove** in Cornwall. It perches on the top of a cliff and you can taste the sea the moment you get out of the car, and if you're lucky you might see red-billed chough skipping around. At the other end of the scale there is the **Sheffield 'cheesegrater'**, a beautiful building housing a multi-storey car park, with an angular steel façade that creates fabulous light patterns.

In terms of books, ***My Garden is a Car Park*** by Kendra Wilson (Laurence King, 2017) is well written, and solves not just the parking conundrum but many others.

The **Greening Grey Britain** pages on the RHS website have lots of advice and ideas for anybody wanting to transform urban and suburban spaces by planting something (rhs.org.uk/get-involved/greening-grey-britain).



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2 MARIANNE MAJERUS GARDEN IMAGES; DESIGN MARIAN BOSWALL; 3 J.S. SIRA / GAP PHOTOS; 4 FLORA PRESS / UTE KLAPHAKE



5 MARIANNE MAJERUS GARDEN IMAGES; THE GREAT CHELSEA GARDEN CHALLENGE GARDEN, RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2015 / DESIGN SEAN MURRAY

2 HIDDEN FROM VIEW

No danger here of anybody blocking out your vista. Designer Marian Boswall has separated car park from garden with a soft, red brick wall and a high pleached hedge. As an added bonus, the car park is surrounded by wildflowers.

3 SHOWCASE IN SUSTAINABILITY

This ticks every box: plenty of plants, a soft surface to soak up the rain, and clever detailing in the lines of the granite sets running across the area. This was designed by that master of sustainable gardening, Nigel Dunnett, for the 2015 RHS Hampton Court Flower Show.

4 INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

This is the rugged industrial solution – the same concrete blocks are used to reinforce fire engine access – that won't ruin the look of your lawn. Its known as Grasscrete, and in time the grass will totally conceal the concrete and where once was grey, you will have green.

5 A HAPPY MARRIAGE

You can see how a car would easily be able to use this parking space. The slabs accommodate the wheels and the plants grow undisturbed in the spaces in between. This was Sean Murray's garden for the 2015 RHS Chelsea Flower Show.