



# Introduction

Why talk about low maintenance gardens? Would anyone talk about a low-maintenance dining room or bedroom? I've never heard of it. When people talk about rooms inside the house there are so many other things to focus on making the most of the space, exciting colours, lighting, great furniture. You assume these rooms need a dust and a Hoover every week or so and a new lick of paint every so often, but that goes without saying. Maintenance is taken as part of life, like washing your clothes or doing the dishes. So why are people (OK, books like this one!) so keen on making an issue of low-maintenance gardens? What's the difference between an inside room and an outside one? *Plants*.



They cause stress about which ones to put in, they grow and take over, or worse, don't grow and die. They need watering and feeding, and all of a sudden it's like having a pet rather than having a room outside.

The logical conclusion from this is that if you remove all the plants the garden will be no higher or lower maintenance than any other room, and we can move on and talk about positive and exciting things like decoration and design.

But, very rarely do people want to remove all plants from the garden. It seems somehow not to be a garden if it doesn't have any plants at all.

And this is where the fodder for books like this comes in – what can you have in your garden keeping it as close to normal 'room maintenance' as possible?

### **What about a lawn?**

If you think of this as a carpet that needs a vacuum once a week (using a lawn mower rather than the Dyson) it might be acceptable. If that's too boring you can pull the lawn up, replace it with paving and it'll just need a sweep. Rather like pulling the carpets up inside the house and revealing the floorboards.



### **Containers?**

Well they're like houseplants and no one worries about having to remember to water them, they seem very ... 'contained' and controllable.



### Planted beds?

Now this is where we start to get into gardening, pure and simple, and this is where people who don't want to do gardening switch off. It may be possible to remove all the planted beds and there are plenty of gardens that do just that. A halfway house between planted beds and containers is raised beds – they still seem quite controllable and can be called large containers if you stretch it – and you might be happy to have a few bits of 'real gardening' in there if the plants are as self-sufficient as possible.

So this book will talk about these and how to include them in the garden and keep the work down to a minimum.

I really want to break away from the negative feel of most books on low-maintenance gardens. They always remind me of diet books – counting minutes spent in the garden like counting calories – when really we should be celebrating how wonderful gardens can look even when ... no, *especially* when there's not too much gardening to do.

Gardens are rooms outside yes, but they are so much more exciting than just another room. You have much wider scope for creating your own world and for letting your imagination run riot.

I happen to think gardens are more exciting than anything inside the house because the possibilities for creating spaces and for changing them are so much greater; but fundamentally, the similarities between outside and in outweigh the differences. Once I've finished talking about the really time-consuming 'gardening' tasks and how to design them out of your garden, what I'm focusing on is creating really exciting spaces. Yes, they'll need a dust and a brush every week or so, but no more and no less than the dining room.

So we've a little in here that's a bit negative – about taking out and reducing and compromising – but most of the book, and by far the most important part, is about inspiration for what can be achieved outside.



## So the approach of the book is ...

### 1. Planning

Plan to remove as much gardening as you can and as you want to from your garden.

### 2. Design

Design it to be stunning with or without the green stuff.

### 3. Horizontals

Once you've got the design, what to make the floor out of.

### 4. Verticals

And how to form the uprights – walls, fences, hedges.

### 5. Plant design

If you do put plants in the garden I've included a section on how to do it as painlessly as possible.

### 6. Which plants?

And then a directory of which plants to use.

### 7. Lighting

Lighting and making the best use of light in the garden.

### 8. Water

Strictly not low maintenance – water will take a bit of cleaning and tinkering, but it's not really gardening.

### 9. Decoration

What are the best decorations?

### 10. Wildlife

A wildlife garden can be wonderfully low maintenance; it's an off-the-wall solution to the maintenance problem.

**After that there are 10 wonderfully inspirational, low-maintenance gardens to look at.**



### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT ...

An interesting side note is that many gardens by top designers will be low maintenance. People who are keen gardeners tend not to get designers in, so part of most briefs to designers will be to make the garden 'low maintenance'. Which means that the real cutting-edge garden design, the brilliant, exciting new trends, come into this category.