



outdoor kitchen

This small courtyard garden is the perfect place to cook up a storm, no matter what the season.

Words Peter Barrett
Photography James Geer

Tucked behind mock-Tudor Toorak mansions and just a lazy job over the railway line from Kooyong Tennis Club, this Rick Eckersley-designed courtyard and pergola requires little maintenance and looks good all year round. In summer, the Virginia creeper sprouts grapevine-like leaves inside and on top of the clear Perspex roof. Espaliered lemon trees along one wall supply the owners with gin and tonic garnishes, and a barbecue facing the dining table allows the chef to feel part of the action. On cooler nights, the overhead gas-fired heater turns the space into a second kitchen/dining room. The brief was to extend the couple's living space (glass doors open directly onto the garden) and when the striking redbud trees are in blossom or covered in foliage the courtyard transforms into a whimsical forest. On the ground, clumps of *Liriope muscari* "royal purple" ensure the colour lasts through summer; Japanese maple and white, oak-leaved hydrangea peek out from behind the pergola wall, giving the illusion that the garden just keeps on going.

our tip

Nourish new plants through summer by soaking water storage crystals (Yates Waterwise crystals cost \$15.40 for a 250-gram packet) in a seaweed solution such as Seasol (1.25 litres costs \$16.50).



Stockists

Australian Art Resources,
77 City Road, Southbank.
Phone 9699 8600,
www.artresources.com.au
Acorn Nursery,
673 Canterbury Road,
Surrey Hills.
Phone 9890 3162,
www.acornnursery.com.au
Eco Outdoor,
422 Burnley Street, Richmond.
Phone 1300 131 413,
www.ecooutdoor.com.au
Murobond Paints,
Eco Concepts Building,
422 Burnley Street,
Richmond.
Phone 9427 9524,
www.murobond.com.au

create the garden

- 1 Eastern redbud trees (*Cercis canadensis*) have pea-shaped, rose-coloured blossoms in early spring. If you can't find them in nurseries try its fashionable relative, *Cercis canadensis* "forest pansy", which has burgundy foliage and purple-pink spring flowers. Available in a 25-centimetre pot for \$69.95 from Acorn Nursery.
- 2 *Liriope muscari* "royal purple" is a drought-resistant ground cover alternative to lawn. The dark-green, strappy-leaved plant bursts into a mass of purple flowers from about now until autumn, when the flowers are replaced by pretty black berries. Available in a 14-centimetre pot for \$16.95 from Acorn Nursery.
- 3 The feature sculpture, *Horizon Figure*, by Adelaide-based artist Greg Johns (who did the swirly ribbon sculpture *Origin* at Chadstone Shopping Centre) serves as an interesting barbecue talking point. It is made of Corten steel, a material that forms a protective layer of rust. Contact Australian Art Resources (which has a show of Johns' work until November 14).
- 4 Bluestone crazy paving softens the "squareness" of the layout and provides organic shapes at ground level (it is bordered by Miniature Mondo grass, *Ophiopogon japonicus nanus*). Getting it right is tricky, so consider bringing in a professional. Available for \$73 per square metre from Eco Outdoor.
- 5 The pergola is made of steel but painted in a micaceous oxide paint that gives it a slightly rough-looking texture. The pergola walls have been done in a stipple finish that reduces glare. Both paints are available from Murobond Paints: Bridge Paint from \$56 per litre (\$140 for four litres), Muro Wash from \$34 per litre (\$80 for four).
- 6 Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) has been trained clockwise around stainless-steel tension cables (tightened every two years) inside and outside the pergola. Pots (14 centimetres) cost \$11.95 from Acorn Nursery.
- 7 Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum* "Seiryu") and white-flowering oak-leaved hydrangeas (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) provide colour and are harder than you might expect. The maples come in 25-centimetre pots for \$69.95 and hydrangeas cost \$24.95 for 20-centimetre pots from Acorn Nursery.