

## Street appeal VERGE OF SUCCESS

A verdant front garden that extends beyond your front fence can add value and sociability to your home.

STORY Elizabeth Wilson

### Spills and thrills

"We wanted the interior garden to spill out onto the street," says Myles Broad from Eckersley Garden Architecture of this verge garden featuring jacarandas underplanted with massed *Dietes iridioides* and *Lomandra longifolia* 'Tanika'. "It visually softens the ultra-contemporary house." [e-ga.com.au](http://e-ga.com.au)

Photography by Sally Plottel (this page, top), Maree Homer (this page, bottom), Priya Schuback (opposite).

### Making an entrance

The front path to this home was built where a driveway once was, allowing for a wide, uninterrupted view from the footpath to the front steps. A pretty perennial garden by Ian Barker Gardens does the rest. [landscape.net.au](http://landscape.net.au)



A gorgeous front garden is a precious pocket of outdoor space. It performs double duty, providing homeowners with a slice of sanctuary and giving the home a sense of presence on the street. "The front garden is the first thing people see, so it's an important statement about your home," says Matt Leacy, landscape designer from Landart Landscapes in Sydney.

In real-estate terms, first impressions really do count. As Melbourne landscape designer Ian Barker puts it, "The space from the footpath to the front door is the most important component of any garden if you want to add value to your home." Indeed, according to McGrath Estate Agents, investing \$5000 in your garden could add as much as \$25,000 to the property's value by attracting stronger buyer interest.

But perhaps more important than lifting property values is the fact that a lovely front garden will lift the spirits of the garden's owners and local residents alike. "I love front gardens because they become part of the fabric of the neighbourhood and can encourage interaction between neighbours," says Scott Leung, principal designer with Melbourne's Eckersley Garden Architecture. "I love chatting and sharing cuttings when I'm gardening out the front of my home." ►

### Small treat

It measures only 4x3m, but the front garden of this Sydney terrace is big on textural display, thanks to a combination of clipped *Buxus* balls, strappy liriop, succulents and rampant herbs. It's the handiwork of Richard Unsworth at Garden Life. [gardenlife.com.au](http://gardenlife.com.au)







When designing your front garden, think outside the square – or beyond the boundary of your property, says Matt. “We always try to incorporate verge planting into any front garden we work on,” he says. “Why not start making a good impression from out on the street?” The key to a successful front-garden design, Matt explains, is to blur the line of the front boundary with textured and layered planting. “If you need a front fence, it’s much nicer to be able to hide the fence among plants so it’s less visible and softer in appearance from the street,” he says. “Ideally, you want to try and disguise where the property begins and ends. This will open the property visually and make it seem bigger, rather than creating heavily defined spaces.”

Scott also encourages his clients to incorporate verge planting in their front-garden designs. “In the long-term, a verge garden is easier to maintain than a patch of lawn and you get the year-round benefits of lovely textural and floral displays,” he says. You’ll need to obtain approval from your local council before planting the verge – and each municipality will have its own conditions for the types of plants allowed – but most are in favour of verge planting because it fulfils the wider community’s sustainability aims and improves the street overall.

“You’ll need to ensure the plant heights don’t block the sight lines of cars, and create safe pedestrian access,” says Scott. But with those conditions observed, the rewards are many. **H&G**

### Gentle announcement

At this front entry, created by Paul Bangay, boundary lines disappear, thanks to lilly pilly hedges and an arch of bougainvillea. “Creepers spilling over walls or vines dripping from steel arches help to soften the entrance and welcome the visitor,” says Paul. [paulbangay.com](http://paulbangay.com)

### SOFTENING EFFECT

“Without greenery, this front fence would look a bit like a fortress,” says Matt Leacy, who modified the design of an existing wall to accommodate the plantings (right). The wall now steps in, creating niches for Magnolia grandiflora ‘Teddy Bear’ trees. The clipped boxus in front and tall lilly pilly hedge behind help the wall recede. [landart.com.au](http://landart.com.au)



### GARDENING H&G

#### Upfront

Designed as a “grassy, flowering meadow”, this garden visually anchors the grand home it surrounds, says Myles. The ‘meadow’ consists of purple and white *Liriope*, and mondo grass, plus clivia and lilies for seasonal colour. Paths of huge slate flagstones and tall tulip trees complement the scale of the home. [e-ga.com.au](http://e-ga.com.au)



#### Open hearted

Framing this garden (left and right) is a low picket fence, in keeping with the heritage home. The 4cm gap between pickets allows the Portuguese laurel hedge to show through. “Opening a garden to the street is a great thing,” says landscaper Ben Scott. [benscott.com.au](http://benscott.com.au)

#### DON’T FENCE ME IN

According to Scott Leung, the style of planting you adopt along the front fence says a lot about your lifestyle. “It all depends on how connected you want to be to the neighbourhood,” says Scott. “Go open and transparent if you want interaction with your neighbours, or use dense screening if you prefer privacy.” For open-style planting, he suggests perennials and groundcovers such as lomandra, hellebores and dichondra in combination with trees such as

*Albizia* or jacaranda. For dense screening, use thicker evergreen shrubs such as *Osmanthus*, viburnum and *Elaeocarpus*, clipped or cloud-formed, to create a block at eye level.

In addition, consider the colour of your fence. “It’s one of the biggest mistakes people make,” says Scott. “The front fence needs to be dark so it recedes and lets the foliage colours come to the fore. Do away with white for your picket fence as it will only dominate the garden and highlight the sense of it being a barrier.”

