

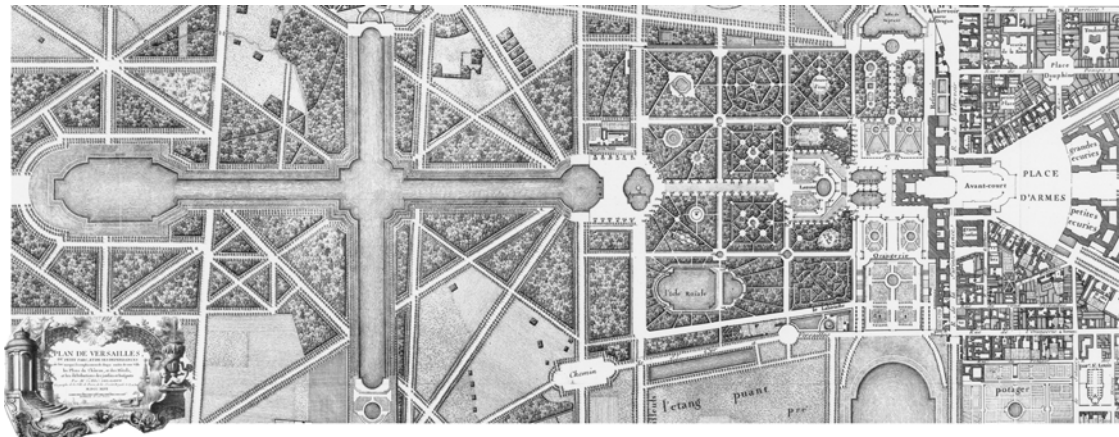
Formal and Informal Garden Design



Formal garden – this is a garden laid out with complete regularity on formal lines and in accord with the methods of classic design. Hard landscaping is usually used to define the main lines of the design, although planting may also be symmetrically arranged in rows or geometric beds.

Informal garden -This is a casually designed space with few straight lines, often depending on curving, organic lines. It may draw inspiration from natural habitats. This style of garden is sometimes referred to as naturalistic.





The overriding feature of a formal garden is the use of regular lines with plants arranged in symmetrical locations and geometrical designs. Plants are usually arranged in rows or other regular patterns. In informal gardens, in contrast, plants are often positioned in clumps (a circular group of three or more plants) or drifts (an elongated grouping of plants). Clumps and drifts are most often planted with an odd number of the same kind of plant to give the appearance of a more natural grouping.

As noted, informal gardens are often naturalistic, echoing the surrounding landscape. They may do this by mimicking the planting patterns of a natural habitat, or simply by echoing some of the plant species and materials found in the wider landscape.

Many larger gardens feature elements of both formal and informal style, with more formal gardens nearer the house and less formal planting as the garden moves further away from the house.

Formal Gardens in Detail

Formal garden design echoes the classical architecture of Greece and Italy. Although some of the earliest Islamic gardens were based on strong geometric lines, and may be considered the earliest of formal gardens, classical and Renaissance influences have had a much stronger impact on formal garden design over the centuries. Among the most famous formal gardens are Versailles and Fontainebleau, both of which were designed by Andre Le Notre. Although these gardens are massive in scale, the structure and balance of formal garden design can also work well on a much smaller scale.



Versailles

Key elements of a formal garden design include:

Symmetry

Symmetry about an axis or central line. This could be a pathway or lawn, or even a central planting bed. Generally, the axis focuses on a dominant feature, such as a sculpture, statue, or ornament.



If space allows, cross-axes can be created; some larger gardens have multiple axial routes that create views along and across the garden.

When designing a formal garden, the space is usually divided into halves or quarters. Larger gardens can be partitioned further, but divisions should be as sizeable as possible to maximise the visual impact of long vistas, or the repetition of topiary or trees.

Parterres, water pools, and expanses of lawn are also common features in formal design.



Prominent Focal Point

Sculpture is commonly used as a focal point in formal garden design. In traditional gardens, statues of gods and mythological creatures were frequently used. In modern designs, a wider range of subjects and abstract works are used as focal points more frequently.

Topiary

Clipped hedging, typically box or yew for evergreen structure, is often used to define space within a formal design. Topiary provides structure, and dwarf box hedges may be used to form patterns in parterres.

Ornament

Large, ornate urns, often on plinths or balustrades, provide focal points or punctuation in traditional formal designs. Modern formal gardens may use the same technique, but with simpler designs.

Natural Stone

Paving provides an architectural element for pathways and terraces. Sawn and honed natural stone slabs can create regular patterns, or may be used to edge lawns and gravel paths.

