



Expert tip

Patterning creates visual interest, contrast and movement. Materials that provide patterned textures include paving, mosaics, raked gravel and unusual tree bark such as you would find on a Chinese elm.

More than a feeling

Using texture in a garden design is about more than introducing tactile elements

Texture is one of the essential design elements that can be utilised in landscape design to create a beautiful, unified outdoor space and activate an emotional response, making you want to reach out and touch.

Texture can be used as a visual as well as a tactile feature. The latter can be especially effective when used as a focal point for gardens where children play, or for sensory gardens where materials and plants are meant to be touched and interaction is encouraged. Texture can also affect the quality of light in a landscape – for example, feathery foliage produces filtered light; thick, leathery leaves provide dense shade – so that needs to be considered, too, when designing and planting a garden.

Nature as inspiration

When thinking about how you can use texture, take your cue from nature. There are many different types of naturally-occurring textures – for example, beads of water forming on the smooth surface of a leaf, ice crystals, the patterned bark of a tree, autumn leaves on the ground, weathering of wood and lichen on rocks.

Texture is the element that makes you feel something in the garden, whether it's the pleasant sensation you get when touching the soft furry foliage of a plant such as Lambs' Ears, laying on the grass under the shade of a tree, or soaking up the winter sun on a smooth paved area.

Different textures and combinations of them have varied effects on people and their perception of that space. The use and composition of texture in the landscape can provide spatial definition, making an area feel larger or smaller, busy or calm, static or dynamic. Following are some ways you can use texture when designing a garden.

Rough with the smooth

Rough-textured elements often provide a substantial foundation for a landscape with their solid, earthy feel and are also useful as contrasting features. Some examples of materials with rough textures are sawn stone, natural rock boulders, gravel, mulch, tree fern stems and rendered walls.

Smooth textures appear clean and crisp. Some examples are tiles, glass, water, steel, smooth bark and large glossy leaves. Smooth

ABOVE The natural texture of timber, whether sawn logs or fencing, contributes warmth and visual appeal.

BELOW Texture in the landscape can come in the form of leaves and branches or simple droplets of water.



surfaces give an impression of order and control. They are also often reflective so the element can be perceived as a flat object or as a multi-dimensional one because of the reflected colours or patterns within it.

Soft textures can be the most effective feature of a garden as they invite people to touch and impart a warm feeling. There are many ways to introduce softness to a landscape. Some examples are soft-leaved plants, flowers, grasses, ferns and tropical plants. Hard textures (paving, metal, glass) lend a cold, firm and permanent feeling to a landscape.

Contrast or complement?

Contrast is important for all design elements as it creates features. Some textural examples are the rough texture of dry-stone walls next to smooth paving, or a large-leaved feature plant in the midst of a small, tightly-leaved hedge. Contrasting textures can attract attention to a feature or direct attention to a nice view.

Complementary textures can create unity and calm in the landscape. Similar textures may be used to make an unsightly area blend in by encouraging the eye to glide over it. Complex textures, such as patterns, attract attention, while smoother textures allow the eye to pass across them without interruption. Overall, the textures in a unified landscape should gradually change from fine to coarse as the eye moves

around. The exception is where you want to create a feature by juxtaposing fine textures with coarse textures.

Textures can be used to define a space as active or passive. A variety of bold, contrasting textures activates the landscape and promotes movement, while a selection of blended, similar textures creates a calmer, more passive space for relaxation. ■

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Foliage texture

When thinking of texture in the garden, foliage plays a major role because it's the use of plant life that defines a space as a garden. One example of this is the use of fine-textured foliage in the foreground with the gradual transition to larger leaves towards the back. This can make the garden look bigger than it actually is and more open. To draw the eye and add textural interest, you can use plants with papery, crinkly or lacy leaves, prickly plants (such as cacti), or plants with thick leathery leaves (such as some succulents).

BELOW Decorative river pebbles and gravels can introduce interesting colours and textures into your garden.

BOTTOM Random natural stone wall cladding or paving adds textural interest and suits many garden styles.



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