

FEELING GOOD

To create an interactive, feel-good garden, you need the right combination of textures

Words: Jacki Brown



Gardens are places where we can all interact with nature. And, if we get the design of our gardens right, this interaction can be much more than simply pleasant — it can make us feel calm and improve our sense of wellbeing. Just think of a

soft breeze in summer, the movement of trees in the wind or the sound of trickling water; now remember how that makes you feel.

Humans are innately drawn to nature and enjoy spending time in natural environments and interacting with living things. The outdoor

environment of our own backyard creates an opportunity for us to relax and de-stress — whether it's by gardening, entertaining or just enjoying the view. Being outdoors is also essential for children's development. Giving them an opportunity to play, explore and learn is vital.

Essential design 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, causing you to want to reach out and touch. As a design element, texture is simple to define but putting the principles of designing with texture into practice can sometimes be a bit more complex. However, it's an effort worth making as everyone can appreciate the effects of texture in the finished landscape.

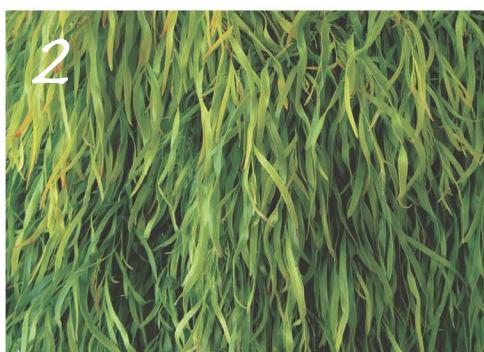
Texture can be used as a visual feature as well as a tactile feature. The latter can be especially effective when used as a focal point for gardens where children play or for sensory gardens where materials and plants are meant to be touched and interaction is encouraged. Texture can also affect the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

1. Draw your inspiration from nature, such as the colour and texture of autumn leaves and other foliage. Garden design by Gardens by Design.

2-4. Use different foliage types for texture. From left: *Acacia cognata 'Fettuccini'*, *Chlorophytum 'Bonnie'* and *Pelargonium 'Jester Purple'*.

5. The rough texture of natural stone can be used as an effective contrast to other smoother garden textures. Garden design by Dirtscape Dreaming.

6. Water has a smooth texture that can be used to balance out the rough textures such as stone. Garden design by Mark Perriman Landscapes.





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 is the pleasant sensation you get when touching the soft, fuzzy foliage of a plant such as Lambs' Ears (*Stachys byzantina*), 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 texture 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.

Use of foliage texture

Plantscape design primarily involves the careful use of foliage texture. When thinking of texture in the garden, foliage plays a major role because it is the use of plant life that defines a space as a garden. One example of this in a garden 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.

- **Formal:** Use smooth and consistent textures that are pleasing to the eye, such as regular leaf sizes (for example, evergreen hedges) and materials with the same patterning. Employ a balance of soft and hard textures and emphasise regularity and flatness.
- **Contemporary:** Opt for a bold contrast of textures in the features you use, which include man-made patterns and textures. Favour smooth over rough and when using natural materials use ordered textures such as stack-stone walls and natural plant forms in regular patterns. Place the focus on hard materials and a design that is crisp and edgy.
- **Bush garden:** This style calls for a random assortment of textures that imitate nature. Use features that combine rough textures with smoother, softer textures. Make extensive use of plant textures for contrast and include weathered hardscape elements such as aged timber.

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 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.

Patterning creates visual interest, contrast and movement. Landscape materials that provide patterned textures include paving, mosaics, repetition of plants with unique forms, fences, raked gravel and unusual tree bark such as you would find on a Chinese elm or crepe myrtle.

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 give a cold, firm and permanent feeling to a landscape. This includes paving, rocks, succulent plants, timber, metal and glass.

Other unusual textures can be a draw point, such as papery, crinkly or lacy leaves. Some examples are Japanese maple varieties, cardboard palm, cacti and echeveria.

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 have the effect of creating unity and calm in the landscape. Similar textures may be used to blend or hide an unsightly area by encouraging the eye to glide over the area.

Texture as a design feature

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, or vice versa, as the eye moves around the garden. The exception is where you want to create a feature by juxtaposing fine textures with coarse textures to create contrast.

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. ■

This article was prepared by Jacki Brown and the team at ecodesign on behalf of the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers & Managers (AILDM). If you would like to find an AILDM member in your area, visit the website: www.aildm.com.au.

