



A city garden incorporates an ingenious blend of circles and curves to extend the sense of space in a restricted linear lot.

The Rolling Stones famously sang that you can't always get what you want — but, as they went on to say, you can still sometimes get what you need. The lyric might just as well apply to garden design. Especially garden design in a city.

Designing a garden — any garden — is all about choices, but in city gardens where space is at a premium, decisions are often forced by the simple facts of the situation. The lot size is limited. There may be something unsightly within easy view. The client may require space for children to play, which in turn reduces the space available to the adults.

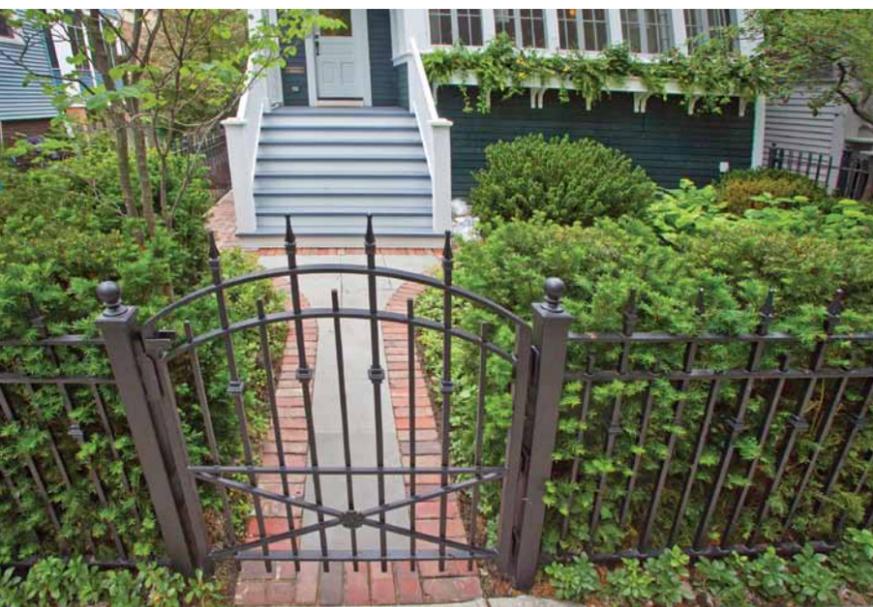
The garden that landscape architect Kris Barker designed for an 1890s house in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood illustrates the point. Choices had to be made. "This was a program-based design, not concept-based," remarks Barker of the project which this year received an award for residential design from the American Society of Landscape Architects in Illinois. "I had to make sure I got all the program elements in."

With a lot measuring 28 by 160 feet, including a garage, "getting with the program" required some thoughtful planning. The owners have young children, so

space needed to be set aside for a playset plus a lawn large enough to allow games and running around. The adults wanted a patio, a fountain, a vegetable garden, a black wrought iron front fence and a spot for the barbeque. Convenient access from the entry gate around the side of the house back to the garage was necessary, while window boxes along the front sun porch would certainly be a nice touch. Of course, everything needed to be beautiful.

"There were lots of demands on a small yard," notes Barker. "So the question was how to meet these various needs in a small space and not have it feel cramped."

A useful concept for dealing with these issues is what designers call "value engineering." In other words, how much value does a given item have for you? For example, it would have been splendid to have a half-pergola out by the garage to provide a focal point to the design as well as a seating area, but that was the best spot for the playset, so the pergola



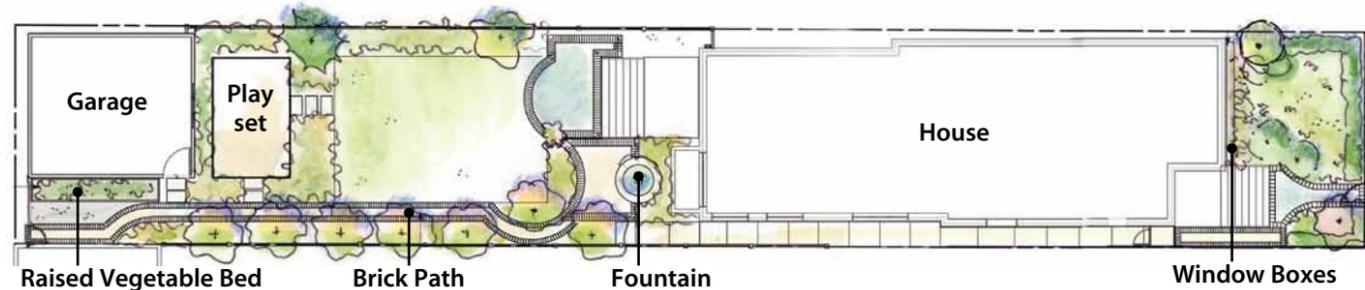
Going in Circles

Story By Carolyn Ulrich
Photography By Ron Capek

The design for this long, narrow city lot makes use of every inch of space, beginning at the front gate and following the brick walkway to the rear yard where a circular fountain strikes a dominant note. Narrow borders of perennials selected for their foliage rather than their flowers line the fence on either side.



The bluestone patio arches out into the lawn while its mate echoes the curve in the opposite direction. Boxwood, lady's mantle and heuchera soften the line as it flows around the katsura tree.



was put on hold until the children grow older. The window boxes along the front of the house could have been custom-designed, but purchasing them ready-made was more economical.

The old Chicago brick pavers used for the walkway and patio, however, became must-haves, not only because the owners liked the look but also because the pavers fit well with the style of the 1890s clapboard house. You decide where you want to spend the money and then move on.

The finished garden offers some surprises. First, it appears well established but is in fact relatively new. It was designed in 2010, with the hardscape work beginning that fall, followed by the planting in 2011.

More importantly, there's the contrast between the overall linearity of the long narrow rectangular lot and the interplay of the multiple circles and curves that comprise the basis of the design.

Hints of what is to come appear at the outset as the rounded front gate, custom-designed to be period-appropriate, leads into a bluestone walkway that fans out at the front steps and then sweeps around the side of the house into the rear yard.

At this point the view opens up, but not entirely. There's an immediate pause to admire the 6-foot-wide circular fountain and the mid-sized katsura tree that conveniently blocks the sightline to the garage and play set. To the right of the fountain area, the space is balanced by a bluestone

patio that curves out into the lawn. A large circular urn of pink and blue hydrangeas on a brick plinth forms a central focal point.

Step out into the lawn, look back at the house, and the reverse perspective reveals another important design element. While the bluestone patio swoops outward, there's a matching curve that swirls inward around the katsura, forming an S-shaped interplay of convex and concave. "When there are curves in a long space, the eye follows the circles, and the sense of space is increased. If I had created a straight line across the lawn at this juncture, there would have been a cut-off-at-the-knees feeling to the design," states Barker.

The theme of curves and circles reappears throughout. It continues subtly in



Top: An encompassing view of the entire rear yard. A tall pine tree and other greenery help the play structure become less distracting. The perennials planted along the north wall grow in full sun while those growing on the facing wall were selected for their shade tolerance. Above: The space adjoining the garage is tight, but it faces south and receives sufficient sun to make vegetable gardening a realistic option for the family. Note the dark "line" between the two timbers created by simply separating them with spacers.

the lines of the walkways and extends even to the plant selection. In the rear yard, the walkway jogs slightly as it passes by the katsura and then again at the garage, a design tweak that helped make room for the raised vegetable bed and a columnar arborvitae along the fence. A further iteration of the concept is the garden's multiple globe yews and boxwoods, described by Barker as "circles but on a different plane." A line of boxwoods interplanted with cimicifuga grows alongside the fountain. A pair of globe yews helps to conceal the base of the playset. In the front yard, another globe yew provides a termination point to the yew hedge that provides privacy along the fence.

Key plants in the design are the trees — a row of seven 'Chanticleer' ornamental pears that march along the south fence in the rear yard and serve to screen views of neighboring backyards; a Korean mountain ash (*Sorbus alnifolia*) and a white pine along the north fence; a dwarf saucer magnolia (*Magnolia soulangiana*) next to the fountain where it can be easily appreciated from the home's screened back porch. Filling in the space along the fences is an array of perennials that offer interesting textural contrasts in addition to their flowers — astilbe, heuchera, lamb's ears, lady's mantle, 'Roxanne' geranium, 'Purple Dome' aster, 'Caesar's Brother' Siberian iris and 'Walker's Low' catmint. In spring, there are flowering bulbs galore. The owners also love hydrangeas, and there are several dotted about.

The vegetable garden, intended partly for the children, is a raised bed 15 inches high, 3 feet wide and 10 feet long. Tucked into a narrow space on the south side of the garage where it receives good sun, it was built of pressure-treated lumber with wood spacers between the timbers to create shadows and add "detail" to the design — a maneuver that creates additional interest at no additional cost. The bed is set on crushed gravel topped with fabric liner to keep the soil from draining out and includes built-in irrigation.

This project, like every garden since gardening began, represents a series of solutions — to problems, challenges, needs, desires — and as the song proclaims, you can't have it all. But you can have enough. Garden designing was ever thus. 🌱

Read more about Kris Barker (RLA, L.E.E.D. AP) at www.krisbarker.com.