



1
AN INFORMAL seating area forms a focal point for entertaining friends and family.

2
PLANTING HAS been kept simple, with box, hydrangea and feather grass providing structure, colour and texture.

3
A MODERN LOW maintenance paved area links the house to the garden and the upper tier to the lower one.

4
THE GARDEN room replaced a dilapidated shed. It took two days to install, and has been adopted by Neil as his official 'man cave', complete with dart board and bar!

Reader
MAKEOVER

“It’s so much better than we ever thought it could be!”

NEIL AND NATALIE COOMBS have transformed their space from a no-go area to a stylish yet functional hideaway



THE 90-YEAR-OLD olive tree took four men to lift into pride of place in the raised bed. It’s the undisputed star of the show.

How we did it...



SPRING

APRIL 2015 “This is how the garden looked when we moved in. Garden designer Christopher Rixton and his team cleared everything in less than a week. Experts took away the shed as it had asbestos roofing. The ground was excavated, a new drainage system was put in, and the foundations were built for the new garden room.”



LATE SPRING

MAY 2015 “All the brickwork was installed, including the raised beds and walls. The garden room went up in two days and then the fencing arrived. The sandstone patio areas were laid and the huge old olive tree was manoeuvred into place.”



SUMMER

JUNE 2015 “The fencing was erected, the artificial grass was installed, raised beds and planters were painted in white and grey, and the plants were put in place. Everything was completed by the end of the month, taking a total of 25 days from start to finish.”

WORDS: FIONA CUMBERPATCH PHOTOS: WWW.GREENBIRDGARDENING.CO.UK



We love this!

A FIRE BOWL creates a cosy ambience when the couple sit outside until the early hours.



FUNCTION AND FORM
The formal dining area is near the house for easy entertaining



LAVENDER smells wonderful and its leaves last all year.



Hydrangea 'Limelight' is a wonderful sight from the garden room



THE ARTIFICIAL LAWN is maintenance-free. It also ensures that no mud is walked through the house.

MY GARDEN PLAN

LOCATION

"We live in a 1920s semi in Bristol and wanted to create a multi-functional outdoor space with separate areas to eat, entertain, play and relax."

THE LOOK

Clean and modern but not clinical, with some striking features.

SITE AND SOIL

Size 11m x 10m (36ft x 33ft)
Faces South-east
Soil Clay

OUR BUDGET

Trees, including pleached limes, fig and olive **£1,750**
Hard landscaping **£6,500**
Raised beds/retaining wall **£6,000**
Fencing **£3,500**
Artificial lawn **£2,000**
Plants **£600**
Firepit **£150**
TOTAL £20,500

HOW LONG IT TOOK

Hard landscaping **8 days**
Building raised bed **10 days**
Fencing **5 days**
Artificial lawn **2 days**
TOTAL 25 DAYS

When Neil and Natalie Coombs moved into their home in June 2104, the garden was a no-go area. "It just wasn't a functional space," says Neil. "There was a big fish pond in one corner, which had been badly made from breeze blocks, a tumbledown shed with an asbestos roof, and some poorly made tiers which had caused damp problems in the house." With a young daughter, Eleanor, now five, and full-time jobs, Neil and Natalie didn't fancy tackling the task of transforming the space themselves. "We did try to cut down some of the overgrown conifers, and put some soil down, but the pond, the shed and an oversized tree were beyond our capabilities," says Neil. The couple turned to Christopher Rixton from www.greenbirdgardening.co.uk. "We told him we wanted to replace the shed with a garden room, and make the whole space work from daytime to evening, spring to autumn," says Natalie. "He came up with designs we were happy with and work started in April 2015."

"It's so easy to care for, all we do is dead-heading"

Christopher divided the modest space into four different areas. He suggested a private dining area near the house, an entertaining spot with fire pit for long, lazy evenings outdoors at the top of the space, a garden room, and a small artificial lawn. The entire garden was stripped out, and experts called in to dismantle the shed because of its hazardous asbestos roof. The concrete foundations were extended and drainage issues were solved, including diverting a natural spring. The garden room was installed in two days by suppliers Dunster House Ltd. "Natalie and Neil always wanted their space to be designed around this feature," says Christopher, "so that was our starting point. We laid a large sandstone patio next to the French doors of their home, which leads to the grassed area. At the top, we installed a permanent seating area with a Corten steel fire bowl, and built rendered raised beds. This area creates a real hub." Horizontal cedar wood fencing was placed around the garden to screen it, and two pleached lime trees, and a fig tree, were planted against it. To soften the lines of the garden room walls, and taking pride of place, is a 90-year-old olive tree. This has been homed in a raised bed, painted in Ronseal's 'Purple Berry'. "The olive is one of our favourite features," says Natalie. "Christopher sourced it from a

company called Villaggio Verde, who import sustainable trees from the Mediterranean." It took four men to lift it into position. Elsewhere, planting has been kept simple, yet wild enough to stop the garden looking clinical. "At the back we created a feature with a bed of French and English lavender, which is popular with bees," says Christopher. "I also planted box balls for structure, and Mexican feather grass for texture. For late colour, there is lime green/white hydrangea 'Limelight'." "It's so easy to care for," enthuses Natalie. "All we have to do is a bit of dead-heading and sweep away the neighbours' leaves in autumn." "We were outside until 12.30am last October, eating and listening to music," adds Neil. "It's just how we wanted to use our garden, and is so much better than we ever thought it could be!"



PAINT A PLANTER in a bright shade to make a feature of what's inside, like this olive tree.