

## **Water - The Essential Ingredient**

We all know that gardens need water to nourish plants & grass, however water has now become a key element of the garden in more ways than one. Water is now the essential ingredient that can really bring a garden to life and help create the serene, idyllic setting we all crave for. Water has the power to soothe & refresh the body and the spirit. Furthermore, the sight & sound of running water plays a valuable role in blocking out the sounds of urban living especially within city gardens, and helps create a sense of serenity & relaxation.

According to Alison Holmes, head of design at award-winning garden design & construction specialists Xternal Dimensions, although adding a simple water feature to your garden is relatively straightforward, for something that's really spectacular, specialist help will be required. Indeed, the most impressive water features not only incorporate sophisticated water delivery systems to create fountains & falls but also feature concealed, dimmable lighting that generates spectacular effects by night. And to really impress your friends & neighbours, the whole installation can even be wired up to an infra-red control unit that can be operated by a remote handset - just like turning on the telly.

Landscaping is also particularly important, especially where space is at a premium. For example, the clever use of boulders can create impact in a relatively small area, while the careful selection & use of different materials, each with its own texture & colour, can create real visual interest.

Over the years, Xxternal Dimensions has created many different types of water feature from the simple to the spectacular. They believe that to create a successful water feature you need three elements. Firstly, the right technical equipment to deliver the water how & where it is required. Secondly, a feature design that not only physically & aesthetically integrates with the water delivery system, but also compliments the style of the house & garden. Finally, lighting to give the feature a completely different complexion when it gets dark and ensure that it can be enjoyed during the evening as well as the day.

If you'd rather be in the water rather than watching it, then one of the most popular features for those who enjoy the outdoor life is a complete self-contained spa. Being massaged gently by jets of air and hot water is without doubt, one of the most enjoyable and effective ways to relax. Imagine coming home after a long tiring day in the office and letting all of your stresses simply drain away in the tranquility of your own garden. The key is to make sure that your spa is integrated into the fabric of your garden so that it really blends in.

Putting a spa in your garden may sound extravagant, but in fact as a Nation we have begun to recognise the true value of the garden as an 'outdoor living room' and are investing much more to create the garden of our dreams.

Spas are usually high on the shopping list of those people who want to make their garden a centre for relaxation and entertainment. Their popularity was given a big boost thanks to Channel 4's Big Brother programme which regularly shows contestants relaxing in an outdoor spa.

Although spas can be supplied as free-standing units usually in attractive panelled wood cabinets, they look really impressive when incorporated into the structure of the garden. This has been made much easier, thanks to another 'must have' feature, decking. Warm, friendly and extremely versatile, decking opens up a world of creative possibilities. For example, a sunken spa makes a superb feature within a decked area with subtle lighting (spas tend to get a lot of night time use) and surrounded by scented flower beds.

So if you're feeling inspired to take the plunge, what should you look for in your new spa?

Alison Holmes has the following advice:

"As one would expect, tubs come in a variety of colours, sizes and shapes including square, round and octagonal. Which you choose will depend on the size and shape of the available

space, the style of your house & garden, how many people you want to fit in and of course, your budget.”

“Spas are basically self contained units with their own water heating, pumping and filtration systems. As they are filled with water simply using a garden hose, they don’t need to be plumbed in. Depending on the model, each spa features a different array of massage jets and therapeutic air jets as well as underwater lights, all of which are usually controlled from a digital panel within easy reach of the seating areas. The more sophisticated models will also include additional massage facilities such as neckjets, more powerful heaters and pumps, air blowers and lighting dimmers.”

“Although the concept of placing a spa in the garden seems odd given our climate, in America where spas are very common, around 90% are installed outside even where the climate is cold. However, you may want to consider surrounding your spa with some form of outdoor room or Gazebo to provide shelter and seclusion.”

“To ensure maximum heat retention and thereby reduce heating costs, most spas are fully foam insulated. This also helps to minimise operating noise, another important factor in choosing a spa as you will want to be able to maintain a conversation when the spa is working.”

“Of course, probably one of the most important things to think about is whether the particular spa you are interested in is comfortable. For example, Do the seats provide lumbar support?, When sitting in the seats will the water reach shoulder level?”

Like all garden features, a spa or water feature is there to be enjoyed and perhaps add a touch of individuality. Like the amazing, futuristic garden which Xternal Dimensions has just

completed in the Midlands. At the centre is a large solar dome housing a refreshing hot tub from which the owner can lay back and enjoy the sky, or alternatively, operate the built-in video projector that projects movies or DVD's onto a white wall at the back of the house - what better place can there be to relax & chill out!