

Try growing a few plants on the side

The only way is up if you want a fashionable garden in 2011. Hannah Stephenson discovers vertical planting

ANYONE visiting the major garden shows this year will no doubt see an array of vertical planting, featuring rich tapestries of plants in weird and wonderful structures, which aim to add colour and form to an otherwise vacant space.

Indeed, vertical planting caught on several years ago, inspired by Frenchman Patrick Blanc, a pioneer in this field who has transformed many buildings' facades into living art, planting rich mixtures of lush foliage plants.

This concept is ideal if you have limited space on your patio or simply want to hide an ugly wall or fence and manufacturers are attempting to meet demand with a number of simple options.

You can now buy anything from simple black canvas pockets with a number of holes in them for the plants, which attach to the wall, to salad and herb vertical planters, living art frames displaying a combination of plants, and troughs which will house lush green plants over a wide area of wall, equipped with water reservoirs which will provide a steady trickle to the plants as they need it.

Gillian Bond, of Treebox, a living wall specialist, said: "Vertical planting has increased in popularity because it makes best use out of the urban garden where space is limited. Living walls are sustainable, eco-friendly, purify the air and reduce the heat in towns."

It's known that plants significantly improve the surrounding air quality, reduce sound pollution, increase biodiversity, insulate buildings and cool our sweltering cities in the summer.

Felicity Waters, landscape architect at Garden Beet, says: "The larger the vertical garden the more complex it becomes in terms of maintenance and installation. If you are going to install a garden above head height you need to think how you are going to water, weed and feed the plants."



IDEAL CONCEPT: Living wall specialist Gillian Bond, of Treebox, says vertical planting has increased in popularity.

While elaborate schemes are available which involve professional installation, domestic gardeners can create their own living walls and vertical plantings without having to be DIY experts.

On a small scale, Burgon & Ball has just launched its Verti-Plant. Made from heavy duty non-woven material, it features planting pockets and an internal irrigation system which allows water to filter from one pocket to the next, while the bottom pockets are sealed to reduce drips and mess. Priced £9.95 for two, it's available in good garden centres and at burgonandball.com.

Alternatively, you can frame a floral or foliage display in a living art frame, priced £47.99 from gardenbeet.com.

With larger constructions, you

may have more success going for lush foliage plants rather than flowers. Good specimens for wall planting include ferns, euphorbia, ajuga, heuchera and geraniums. Place shade-loving varieties at the base of the area and sun-lovers, such as geraniums, thyme and sage, at the top. Add some spring bulbs and try some wild strawberries for the children to pick all summer.

For something larger which you can put up yourself, Easiwall is a vertical planter comprising five self-watering troughs attached to a robust panel 500cm wide by 1m tall, that you fix to a wall. Priced £159, it's available from online stockists gardenbeet.com and selected nurseries. For information, visit treebox.co.uk.

Create as large or as small a

vertical display as you like with the Woolly Wally Pocket, a new type of hanging basket or wall planter that can be used on its own or in groups to cover any wall to create a vertical garden. Made from recycled plastic bottles, the pockets – measuring 61cm x 38cm – cost £34.99 each. They are available from gardenbeet.com.

If you're reluctant to fix anything on to a fence or wall but have limited ground space, Vertigro, a free-standing modular system enabling you to grow your own flowers and vegetables, is worth considering.

Made from Aluzinc and treated PEFC (programme endorsement forest certificate) wood, it will be available from the end of March priced £299, online at vertigro.co.uk.