

Evening Meeting - **Great Front Gardens.**

Alison Marsden combined horticulture, science and garden design into an interesting take on front gardens. Think of them differently from back gardens, and how you actually use this space. Take a viewpoint opposite your house and study it: what is the main feature of the house that strikes you? You are looking at the house as a backdrop. Our needs are for access, parking, all-year interest, and it is on view all the time. Your front garden should make your house look fabulous and welcoming. Alison showed us a plain front garden, and then how by adding plants and features we can transform it.

Pots can soften the aspect of the house and add colour and interest. Climbers, especially roses, can make an impact on a plain wall. Where your front door faces the street, consider painting it a strong colour to attract the eye, and balance it with sympathetic planting. Evergreen shrubs give colour in winter, and a structural aspect to draw the eye. Use late flowering plants such as dahlias, grasses, hellebores, cornus for its bright stems, and scented plants like Hamamelis intermedia "All Gold". Hellebores are best in shade. For Spring, the usual selection of bulbs provide colour, and different varieties will extend the flowering season. Summer gives us a huge choice of plants, but remember orientation, soil type and exposure and then match up your budget and personal preferences. Autumn colour can be provided by Acers, which are not good on chalk, but small ones can be potted. Seed heads from grasses such as Miscanthus sinensei "Kleine Fontane" are striking. Heucheras are excellent and "Marmalade" is a pretty gold/russet leaved variety. They don't like direct sunshine, and in pots are prone to vine weevil, so split and re-pot every two years. Eleagnus ebbingei "Limelight" is a variegated evergreen with splashes of golden yellow. Don't forget berries, with white berried varieties of skimmia available. Vary the hard surfaces, using gravel or paving, and introduce diagonals or curves. Remember your front garden is the first thing people see, so make it worth seeing.