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# Landscape expert weeds out garden trends

*Kelvin Browne: Ponds make the cut, landscape designer says*

By [Kelvin Browne](#)

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Landscape architect and president Neil Turnbull Ltd. and Hedgerow Farm

We're deluged with news of chic restaurants, exotic travel destinations and must-have fashion, but knowing what's trendy in the garden is a challenge. Things don't change fast enough in the garden to be trendy. There's an exception — plantsmen who focus on plants and not as much on how they are combined are into trends. A new exotic peony or rose can cause Apple store-like lineups at the nursery. But garden design is different. Visit the Hidcote garden in England, begun in 1907 (one of the world's most influential gardens), and it doesn't look out of date.



But there must be trends! I ask renowned landscape designer Neil Turnbull what's hot. (Neil has created many astounding residential gardens and is known for the Stratford Festival Garden and the roof garden at the Princess Margaret Hospital.) Neil pauses momentarily: "You do ask the difficult questions."

"People want to include water in projects more now," Neil says. "This can be ponds in a country setting or fountains in town. Other trends have been happening over an extended period — greater use of indigenous planting that doesn't require intense watering once established, and the use of ground covers in massive quantities instead of lawn."

I note that stone and paving in general is also prevalent in gardens lately. "As we get more urban, it's inevitable that we get more hard surfaces," Neil replies. "Small city gardens can be a challenge and hard-surfacing the space and using containers is often the solution."

He also points out that pesticide bans make lawns more difficult to keep weed-free, and the solution for many gardeners is to replace them with paving, be it elegant Credit Valley stone or fake stuff from Canadian Tire.

In recent years, Neil has become known for natural gardens, particularly chemical-free natural swimming pools and roof gardens. Hence, it is a surprise to learn of his current favourite projects. “I enjoy working with a formal vocabulary. I like a European expression.”

Maybe this is a trend?

Unfortunately, you have to be a really serious gardener to do formal — and serious is never trendy.

There’s enviably clipped hedges and precision pruning involved to shape this kind of garden. Perennial beds can be labour-intensive, but they’re nothing compared to several hundred feet of boxwood that needs two or three haircuts a year.

Gardening isn’t top of mind like it used to be. Think of all the cooking shows that educate and influence your choices at a restaurant. It’s similar to how we learn from fashion magazines to shop for clothes. Conversely, people aren’t digging garden TV, related magazines or browsing plants in nurseries like they are visiting a shopping mall. We’re more into food, fashion and travel. As more people live in condos, a garden becomes a few containers on a balcony. A decade ago, people retired and puttered in their garden. Now they retire and go skydiving or mountain biking.

The real trend is that gardening is less trendy than ever. My favourite pastime is becoming esoteric, like horseback riding or perhaps sailing. It’s not that it takes as much money as these hobbies, but gardening requires an investment in time to learn something about it, and time to do it. And most would rather shop, surf the net or dine out.

