



FAMILY GARDENS

HOW TO CREATE MAGICAL SPACES FOR ALL AGES

BUNNY GUINNESS



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HOW TO CREATE MAGICAL OUTDOOR SPACES FOR ALL AGES

BUNNY GUINNESS

D&C
David and Charles

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TO MY CHILDREN UNITY AND FREDDIE



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INTRODUCTION

The final nudge that propelled me into action on this book was my son's fourth birthday party. We had organized a clown to entertain the children's friends and as it was a sunny day we decided that the fun and games could take place in our small back garden. As we settled back into our chairs, looking forward to some gentle amusement, chaos erupted around us. The clown, who normally has all onlookers spellbound, was totally ignored – indeed, no one even seemed aware of his presence. All the children were immersed (some literally) in the attractions of the water garden – reeds, frogs, fish, dragonflies, snails, pebbles and sludge. After an hour of trying to attract attention away from this wildlife extravaganza the poor entertainer gave up, muttering, 'There is just no way anyone could compete with that.'



Of course he was right. An enticing garden can offer children a vast amount of scope for thrills, spills and excitement, far more than the confines of orchestrated entertainment, no matter how good. But how often do you see gardens that are planned around the whole family? We seem to veer between extremes: either the whole garden becomes merely an area to contain plastic climbing frames and the like that make any attempt to create an attractive garden impossible, or else any hint of family fun is banished, sacrificed to the cause of a garden that is purely for admiring.

Now that people tend to be more established in their own homes before their first child comes on the scene, there has usually been time to make the best use of all the space, inside and out. It seems a shame to go back to square one with the garden and banish all thoughts of aesthetic values once the family begins to grow. This precious outdoor area may be the only safe space available where children can play without a watchful adult breathing down their necks, and they spend thousands of hours here with their parents, siblings and friends. Yet most families spend fewer hours, less thought and far less money on fulfilling the potential of their garden than they do on indoor toys and computer games, many of which become discarded all too quickly.

I have aimed to describe in this book how to design and create a garden that will have elements to inspire everyone, from hyperactive ball players to green-fingered artists. I have tried to stress how important it is to get the whole family involved, so that everyone has a vested interest in the garden. After all, every member of the family must have one part of it that strikes a chord, even if it's only the position of the hammock!



DESIGN AND PLANNING

No garden can be a real success unless the overall design is right. This is particularly true of the family garden, which must cater for both children and adults with radically different ideas about the purpose of the plot of land outside the door. At the same time, the garden must look good while requiring no more maintenance than you are comfortably able to provide. It is often not feasible to create the whole garden at once, but as long as you have a cohesive plan at the outset, the work may be carried out in stages as time and finances allow.