



Part 10  
EDITOR'S  
GARDEN  
MAKEOVER

# WELL CONNECTED

The transition between house and garden can have a big impact on how you enjoy your outdoor space

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Photography by Life Style Media. Beanbag and cushions from The Cover Company. Potted plants on landing on stairs Tully & Gardener.



Establishing easy links between different parts of the garden is essential if you want to use it as much as possible, and create a harmonious feel. When I first saw editor Leanne Moore's garden it was obvious the connection between the upper deck and the garden below was a problem. The steep stairs meant you had to descend at a very fast pace; in wet weather this was not for the fainthearted!

**The way you enter a garden can significantly affect the way you feel when you are actually in the space.** One of the main points of entry in this garden was from the upper deck down those steep stairs. I knew this had to change if Leanne and Chris wanted to really enjoy their garden. Now the transition between house and garden is gentle and relaxed; which is just how you should feel when you are outside enjoying nature.

## EASY STEPS

**The best way to make the stairs** less steep was to create a platform halfway down, allowing users to pause and enjoy the view before carrying on.

I also changed the ratio of tread to riser. The old stairs had relatively high risers compared to the tread. The new stairs are shallower (170mm high), and have a wider tread (350mm), allowing a more gradual transition from one level to another.

However to do all this required more space for the stairs. Rather than intrude



**Opposite** Furnish your deck as you would an indoor room, with seating, cushions and plants. **This photo** The old stairs ate into prime outdoor living space.



**+ TIP** Stairs can be very tricky to build so you might want to call in the professionals. Chris had done some of the minor building work but the stairs were beyond his skill level. Leanne and Chris had construction drawings done by a qualified draughtsman and employed an experienced builder, Paul Hawthorn, to construct them.

further into the middle of the deck it seemed logical to move the steps from the centre to the side. This would also allow us to widen the upper deck to create space for outdoor dining and dining.

## CHECKLIST

**There are many things to consider when building outdoor stairs including:**

- + Materials** These should relate to those used for the house and deck or terrace.
- + Safety** Consider non-slip materials and check with your local council for the legal requirements regarding handrails.
- + Comfort** Making treads generous (between 350 mm and 500 mm wide) and risers relatively low (between 80 to 170 mm) will make stairs easy to use, even in wet weather.
- + Function** Outdoor steps are often used as places to sit. Wide, shallow steps are ideal for this. They also make good places to position pots.



**Above** Builder Paul Hawthorn, of Building Elements, creating the new stairs. Paul is a member of the Certified Builders Association of New Zealand and Leanne and Chris were delighted with his work.

## UPS AND DOWNS

Leanne and Chris are thrilled with the progress of the planting in the garden. In the subtropical area which we started planting almost a year ago the lush-leaved ligularia, taro and ginger are thriving; as are the aspidistra, ferns and clivia.

The putaputaweta, the divaricating native shrub that forms a soft hedge around the deck, and the radamachera screening the boundary, have both been regularly trimmed to keep them compact and bushy.

Unfortunately after a recent weekend of high winds one of the large pukas near the back fence was blown over. This meant that the garden lost a significant amount of screening from both the neighbours and the sun. Having planted so many shade loving species beneath this tree we were worried about the repercussions.

The first thing to do was find a

replacement tree. After several calls to big tree nurseries we tracked down a good size evergreen magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*). This will take a while before it reaches the same height and spread as the puka, but its large glossy leaves will work well with our subtropical theme. And of course the white scented flowers will be gorgeous in summer.

So far the sun has not damaged the shade loving plants but if necessary we will cover them with shade cloth during the hottest months until the canopy of the magnolia spreads.

## IN SUCCESSION

It's a good idea to use plants with different flowering times so that there is always something in bloom to enjoy. Leanne and Chris' new garden is predominantly green, but there will be splashes of flower colour throughout the year. The red and yellow *Camellia sasanqua* 'Yuletide' flowered from May to August, followed by the ligularia's

yellow flowers on tall stems. At the end of August the distinctive dark red deciduous magnolia produced its beautiful blooms.

Now the hot orange blooms of the clivia are lighting up the back garden and as it gets warmer there will be the fragrant white blooms of both the new evergreen magnolia and the ginger.



**+ TIP** Add pots and containers of colour to decks and steps to decorate your outdoor spaces for special occasions.

**This photo** Pots add seasonal colour to the mainly green garden. **Top right** Magnolia Vulcan has stunning wine red blooms in spring.



### Leanne's diary

**Our new stairs from the upper deck to the lower level are one of the highlights of our garden makeover. Carol's idea to move the location of the**

stairs has changed our lives! We have gone from having two decks that were virtually useless to having three new outdoor rooms. The top deck is now big enough for a large table and chairs, and the new stairs make the transition from the upper to the lower level a breeze. Now tucked discreetly to one side, the stairs flow gently to the deck that leads to the garden. A new courtyard adjacent to the lower deck is a bonus, and our third outdoor room.

We also got lucky when it came to our builder, Paul Hawthorn, from Building Elements. We knew he was good because we'd used him a few years ago when we renovated our kitchen. He and his trusty team worked magic on our outdoor space. What we have ended up with is beyond our expectations. Roll on summer!