



K-STATE
Research and Extension
Master Gardener
Johnson County

Using Structures In the Garden



Arbors, trellises, pergolas and gazebos are attractive additions to any garden. They can be formal and traditional or contemporary and casual. They may be elegantly symmetric, rustic or eclectic. They may be a focal point themselves. Or, they may simply be a support to showcase a favorite plant.

Perhaps you are running out of garden space or your landscape is not mature and needs some height. Consider a trellis or arbor to provide vertical interest. Do you want to screen a view? Add a focal point? Shape and highlight a particular area of your garden? Direct foot traffic? Provide privacy or define a separate garden "room"? The perfect solution to any one of these garden dilemmas may be a garden structure.

Types of Structures

A **trellis** is basically a two-dimensional frame for plants. It may be freestanding or supported by a wall or fence. A variety of materials may be used depending on the effect you want to achieve. A trellis can be made from a weather-resistant wood such as cedar, redwood or pressure-treated lumber. It can also be made from metals such as steel, copper or wrought iron, and even twigs and branches. Generally, a trellis works best when used as an accent rather than the most prominent feature of the landscape.

Arbors add a third dimension to the trellis. In its simplest form, an arbor consists of two parallel trellises as its sides, with a third trellis as a roof. Classic arbors have a curved roof. Arbors with a built-in bench and perhaps a wall fountain are called **bowers**. A longer arbor consisting of several columns is a **pergola**. A **gazebo** is an arbor with six or eight sides and lattice walls. Simple arbors can be made out of the same materials as a trellis. However, heavier and more complex arbors are normally made from decay-resistant wood.

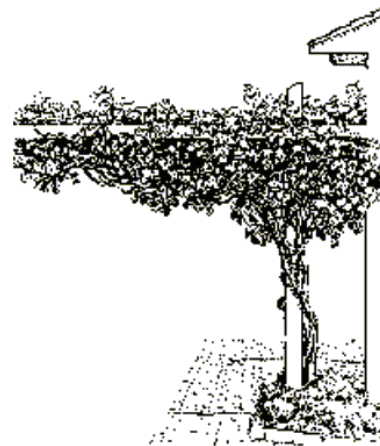
Possibilities . . .

Trellises and arbors can go just about anywhere you like. Consider these ideas.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Front gate | An arbor, along with a matching gate, adds a welcoming touch. Just be sure it's at least 7 feet tall and 5 feet wide for easy traffic flow. |
| Front porch or door | An arbor before the front door or a matching pair of trellises on either side of the porch or door also adds a welcoming touch. |
| Side yards | Encourage visitors to the side yard and around to the back garden with an arbor. Or, flank the side of the house with trellises and vines. Arbors, especially covered with flowering vines, are very inviting and inspire people to want to see what is on the other side. |
| Patios and decks | Arbors and trellises provide privacy around patios and decks or add vertical interest. |
| Fences and garden walls | Enhance a long expanse of fencing or a garden wall with a trellis. Be sure it is a few inches away to allow air space and room for plants to grow. |
| Vegetable gardens | Use A-frames to hold beans, peas and melons above the other plants. Flat trellises can provide an attractive method to double your growing area. |
| Open spaces | A garden path winding through an arbor can lead visitors to other parts of your garden, perhaps to a separate garden room or gazebo. Do you have a large planting bed? Perhaps just the thing it needs is a trellis to highlight a favorite flowering vine or provide a vertical contrast to lower growing plants. |
| Corners | Instead of grouping trees or shrubs in a landscape corner, consider a bower or gazebo to provide the perfect retreat. |

Things to Consider

- Sturdiness** When adding a trellis, arbor, pergola or gazebo to your landscape, consider how it will be used. To support plants or vines, it must be sturdy enough to support the weight of the plants.
- It's a good idea to remember that children will be children. Your garden structure might also need to be strong enough to support the weight of a child!
- Weather** Structures in the garden need to withstand the weather.
- Winter appeal** Unless you plan to remove them in the winter, garden structures must look good by themselves.
- Harmony** Your garden structure will become a focal point of the garden. Manmade objects tend to attract more attention than plants. No matter what type or style of structure you choose, the design should harmonize with both your house and your landscape. A trellis, arbor, pergola or gazebo should add to the beauty of a garden by blending perfectly with its scale and style. Finding the right one can add character and personality while giving your garden a unique look.
- Codes and rules** Check with your city and homeowner's association before building any large garden structure such as a gazebo or pergola to learn if a building permit is required or what codes might affect your structure's design and placement. Some local codes and ordinances govern the height of an outdoor structure, its maximum coverage, the building materials and its setback from lot lines.



Assessing Your Site

To choose the best spot for your garden structure, you need to assess your site and consider your property's orientation, its topography and its weather patterns. Your site's exposure to sun, wind and rain can limit its potential as an enjoyable outdoor room. Studying these may cause you to adjust the site of your proposed gazebo or pergola, change its dimensions or change its design.

Drawing a site plan may also help you properly place your garden structure. Include the following things on your site plan:

- Draw boundary lines and dimensions of your lot.
- Draw an outline of your house noting all exterior doors and which way they open, windows and overhangs.
- Include a directional arrow pointing north.
- Note all views — attractive or unattractive. Does the garden structure block a favorite view from inside the house? Also take into account your neighbor's view into your yard.
- Consider including these items on your site map:
 - Direction of prevailing winds
 - Any spots windy enough to require shielding
 - Utilities and easements
 - Downspouts and drain systems
 - Sprinkler systems
 - Existing plantings

Works Cited

- Atkinson, Scott, editor. *Patios & Decks*. Menlo Park, California: Sunset Publishing Corporation, 1996.
- Atkinson, Scott, Philip Edinger and the editors of Sunset Books. *Trellises and Arbors*, Menlo Park, California: Sunset Publishing Corporation, 1999.
- Barrett, Jim. *Fences, Gates & Trellises*, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Creative Homeowner Press, 1998.

REV . 03/2014

"Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service."
K-State Research and Extension is committed to making its services, activities, and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability, please contact Johnson County Extension at 913.715.7000. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.