

Handy Garden Design Tools

Whether it's you (the practitioner) starting to draft a new garden design or a group of your TH participants engaging in a collaborative planning activity, using basic and low-cost garden design tools can make the process more approachable, creative, and empowering, especially for those who have never designed a garden before or want to increase the aesthetic appeal and professionalism of their hand-drawn designs.

- **Graph paper** provides a scaled grid to map out garden beds, pathways, and planting zones with accurate proportions.
- **Tracing paper** allows for experimenting with different layout ideas without starting over each time, encouraging flexibility and creativity.
- **Colorful pens and pencils** let you distinguish between plant types, zones, or features—adding clarity, organization, and a bit of fun to the process.
- **Stencils** help draw consistent shapes (like benches, trees, or garden beds), making the plan more readable and polished.

These tools speed up the design process and promote visual learning and problem-solving, making them especially valuable in therapeutic horticulture, education, and community planning projects.

Digital Garden Design Options:

1. GrowVeg Garden Planner: growveg.com

- **Best for:** Raised bed and vegetable garden planning

2. Garden Planner Online: smallblueprinter.com

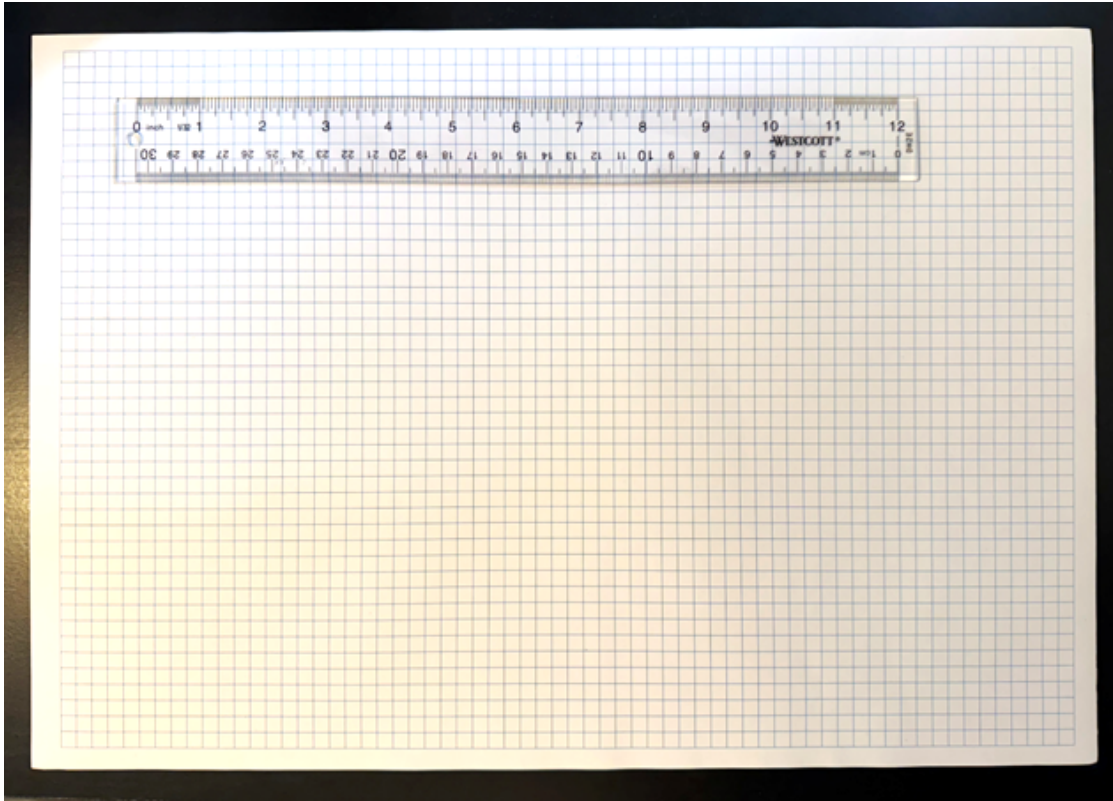
- **Best for:** Quick and simple layout creation

3. SmartDraw: smartdraw.com

- **Best for:** Formal and functional landscape design

1. Graph Paper

Graph paper provides a scaled grid to map out garden beds, pathways, and planting zones with accurate proportions.



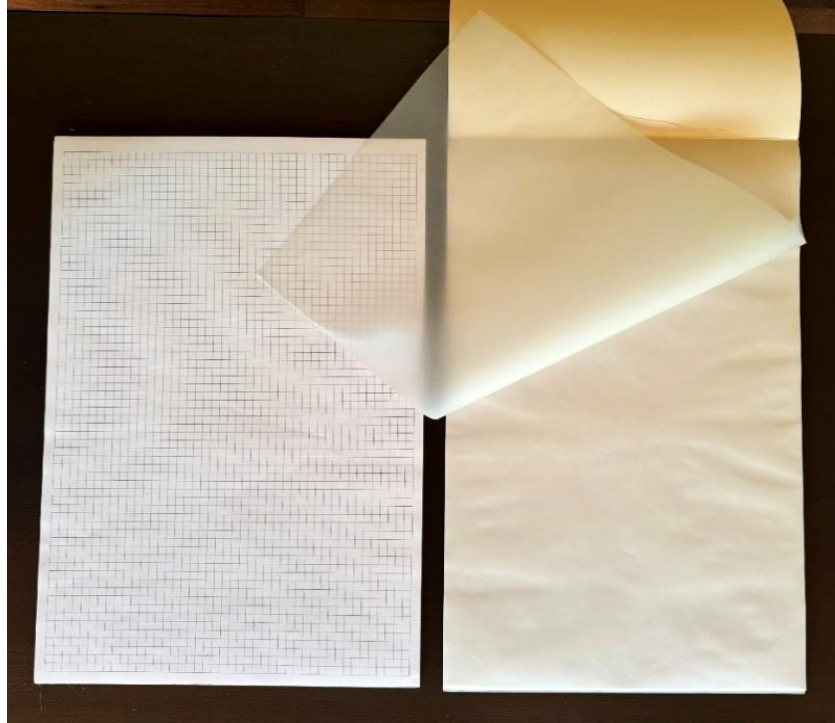
Benefits/Uses:

- **Built-in scale:** The grid allows you to easily represent real-world dimensions (e.g., 1 square = 1 foot or 1 meter), making your design more accurate.
- **Proportion clarity:** Helps you visualize the size and spacing of elements like garden beds, walkways, and seating areas in relation to each other.
- **Straight lines and symmetry:** Makes it easier to draw neat rows, edges, and structured layouts, especially helpful for formal gardens or raised beds.
- **Easy to replicate and revise:** Multiple copies can be made to test different layout ideas or plan for seasonal changes.
- **Supports accessibility:** Simplifies the drawing process for participants who may be uncomfortable with freehand sketching or have fine motor limitations.
- **Enhances communication:** A gridded layout makes it easier to explain your vision to others—like team members, funders, or contractors.
- **Encourages strategic thinking:** Lays a foundation for thinking through spacing, access paths, and garden flow before costly planting begins.

Pro tip! Design with a clear ruler so your lines/design are always visible beneath.

2. Tracing Paper

Tracing paper allows for experimenting with different layout ideas without starting over each time, encouraging flexibility and creativity.



Benefits/Uses:

- **Layering flexibility:** Place tracing paper over a base plan (like graph paper) to test new ideas without altering the original layout.
- **Non-destructive revisions:** Try out different plant placements, pathways, or features without having to redraw the entire design each time.
- **Encourages experimentation:** Reduces the fear of making mistakes, making it easier for participants to explore creative possibilities.
- **Supports visual comparison:** Create multiple transparent layers to compare seasonal changes, accessibility options, or planting schemes side-by-side.
- **Fosters collaboration:** Teams or participants can each work on their own layer, then stack them to combine ideas into one cohesive design.
- **Builds spatial understanding:** Helps users visualize depth, overlap, and relationships between different garden elements.
- **Boosts confidence:** Ideal for individuals who may feel unsure about design—tracing over existing shapes or stencils gives a helpful starting point.

Pro Tip! Use 'drafting dots' to secure tracing paper to graph paper so it's easily removed without ripping.

3. Drawing/Writing Instruments

Colorful pens and pencils let you distinguish between plant types, zones, or features, adding clarity, organization, and a bit of fun to the process.

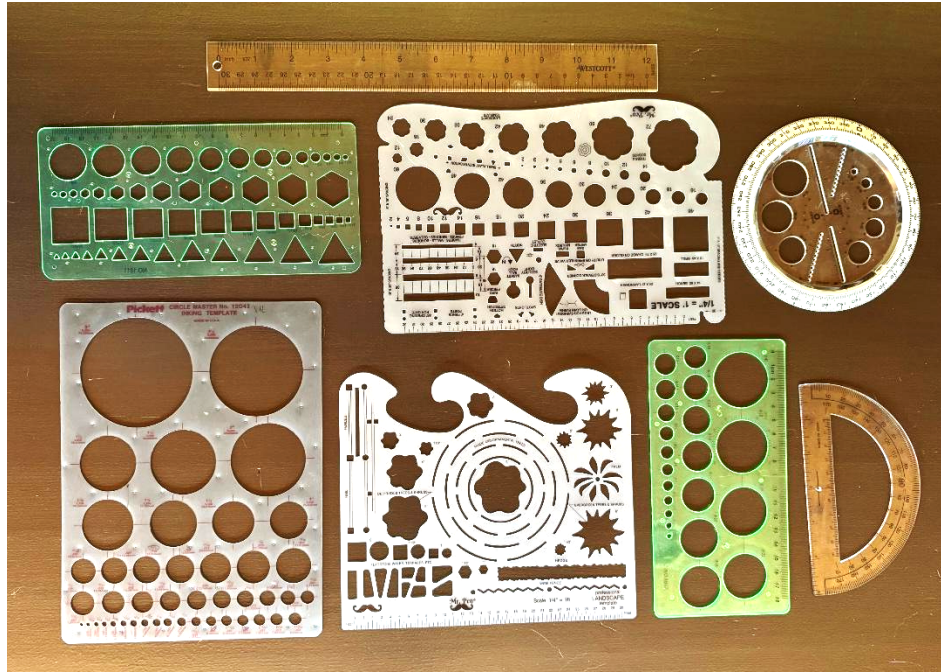


Benefits/Uses:

- **Visual organization:** Different colors can represent plant types, zones, seasons, or features (e.g., pathways, seating areas, raised beds).
- **Improved clarity:** Color-coding helps make complex plans easier to read at a glance—for both you and others reviewing the design.
- **Creative expression:** Invites playfulness and personal style into the planning process, encouraging deeper engagement.
- **Supports group work:** Multiple people can contribute using different colors, making individual input easier to track in collaborative sessions.
- **Easier editing:** Mechanical pencils allow for precise lines and quick erasing when revising layouts or measurements. (Various lead sizes a plus).
- **Encourages participation:** Participants who may be hesitant to draw often feel more confident when using fun, colorful tools.
- **Accessible for all skill levels:** These tools are simple, familiar, and low-cost, making them suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities.

4. Pre-Made Stencils

Stencils help draw consistent shapes (like benches, trees, or garden beds), making the plan more readable and polished.

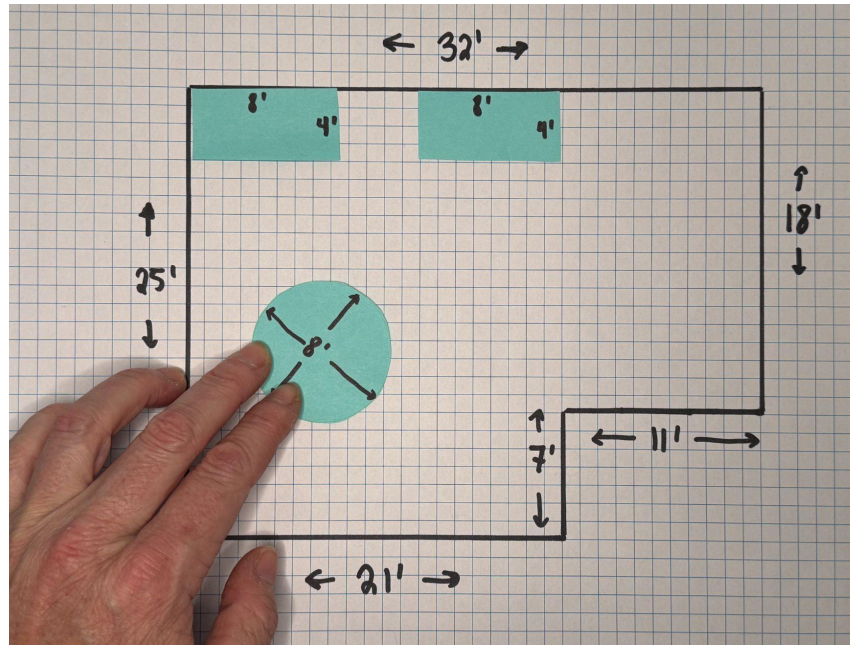


Benefits/Uses:

- **Provide structure and guidance:** Stencils offer ready-made shapes for common garden features (like trees, benches, garden beds), helping users get started without needing strong drawing skills.
- **Speed up the design process:** Stencils save time when drawing repeat elements (like raised beds, pots, or walking paths).
- **Support accessibility:** They reduce the need for fine motor precision, making design more inclusive for participants with limited dexterity.
- **Increase confidence:** Participants feel more empowered and less intimidated when they can create clean, recognizable symbols with ease.
- **Promote consistency:** Standardized shapes make it easier to understand and compare different design ideas, especially in collaborative planning.
- **Encourage creative thinking:** When users don't have to worry about "getting the shape right," they can focus more on layout, flow, and function.
- **Pair well with other tools:** Stencils pair well with graph paper and help you draw elements that match the scale of your design.
- **Great for all ages:** Whether working with children, teens, or adults, stencils make the design experience more fun and approachable.

5. DIY Stencils

DIY Stencils also help draw consistent shapes like pre-made stencils, but they can be cut from paper (to scale if desired) to reflect the exact size of pre-made raised bed kits or design elements that already exist in the space or that you hope to integrate into your design.



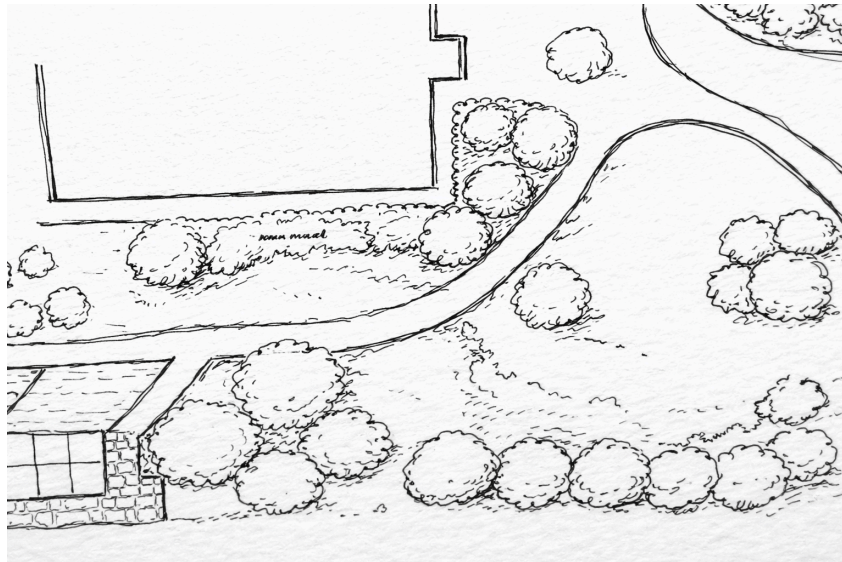
Benefits/Uses:

- **The same benefits** listed in the 'Pre-Made Stencils' section of this document apply to DIY stencils.
- **Flexibility:** The paper cutouts can be moved around a base map until the design you like the most is achieved.
- **Customization:** DIY stencils are highly customizable and can be made to perfectly fit your space.
- **Speed:** Being able to move paper cutouts around a base map to explore ideas is far faster than drawing lines on graph paper drafts. More ideas can be explored faster.

Pro Tips! When working with populations who have lower hand dexterity, cut the DIY stencils from thick cardboard so they are easier to pick up and grasp. When designing outside, cut DIY stencils from sticky notes so the wind doesn't blow them away after they're placed on the graph paper.

Which of these two designs:

- do you find more compelling and aesthetically pleasing?
- looks more professional and polished?
- would capture your interest and support if you were considering funding a new garden?



For more ideas, be sure to check out these documents in the [GrowTH Network](#) Resource Library:

[Properties of a Therapeutic Garden](#)

[Garden Design-Bloom Schedule](#)