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The 10 Most Gorgeous Garden Benches

Truth in Decorating: Designers
Matthew Patrick Smyth
and Amanda Nisbet fall for the charms
of these practical perches

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Amanda Nisbet and the Gatewood bench from Treillage, left, with Matthew Patrick Smyth, who rests on Fermob's Luxembourg bench. See Resources.

More than any other piece of outdoor furniture, a garden bench beckons with the promise of a peaceful respite. "It's a private place to admire the landscape or have an intimate conversation," says decorator Matthew Patrick Smyth, who has a weathered park bench at his 1790s house in Sharon, Connecticut. Popularized by Edwardian architect Sir Edwin Lutyens at the turn of the last century, these plain-air seats play a key role in landscape design, adding visual drama—as well as a friendly, civilizing touch—to verdant spaces.

An alfresco area, decorator Amanda Nisbet says, should be approached like an interior, with benches serving as strategically

positioned sofas. From English formal to industrial chic, these perches can provide a focal point amid manicured greenery or nestle discreetly in a lush field of wildflowers. Keep in mind that certain finishes and materials aren't intended to stand up to the elements and should only be used on a porch or veranda. Teak and concrete, however, "can be left out all year long because they fade to a gorgeous gray and develop a lovely patina," Nisbet says. Many garden benches are even versatile enough to be stationed indoors. As Smyth explains, "They often look great as extra seating in a mudroom, entryway, or casual kitchen." ▶

garden benches



1 BERKLEY CASTLE CURVED TEAK BENCH FROM MECOX GARDENS

"I adore the curved shape," says Amanda Nisbet. "It has a wonderful feminine softness to it." She also extols the teak's natural tone and the quatrefoil cutouts. As for comfort, Nisbet notes, "you feel supported by the angled back even without cushions." She envisions it alone under a tree or in a pair at a round dining table. Length: 72"; height: 35"; depth: 36"; seat height: 17.5"; material: teak (also available with seat cushion); delivery: 3-6 weeks; price: \$4,800



2 DARK HARBOR SETTEE BY LYLE AND UMBACH

"This one has an old-estate vibe," declares Matthew Patrick Smyth. "The circles down the center give it a New England feel, and I like the flair of the peaked tops." Smyth is also keen on the easy pitch of its high back: "I could sit in this all day," he says. Length: 66"; height: 37"; depth: 23"; seat height: 18"; material: hand-carved mahogany in yacht-enamel finish (also available in teak and custom sizes and finishes); delivery: 10-12 weeks; price: \$6,000



3 BEAUJON LOVE SEAT BY CURREY & CO.

"A classic," states Nisbet of this faux-bois charmer. "The lines flow elegantly like sculpture, so it would look nice on a lawn or even in the front hall of a mountain home." Just wide enough for two people, it's perfect for small spaces. Plus, she notes, exposed to the elements the concrete's patina "will get even better with time." Length: 42"; height: 36"; depth: 18"; seat height: 17"; material: tubular steel and concrete in Portland finish; delivery: 1-2 days; price: \$1,190



4 HATFIELD 6' BENCH BY HENRY HALL DESIGNS

"Very refined and Edwardian," says Smyth of the long rectangular form. "The oval motif is pretty, and the finials on the sides are an attractive touch." Smyth also calls it well proportioned and roomy enough to stretch out on—as long as a cushion is added. Length: 71.5"; height: 38"; depth: 23"; seat height: 15.75"; material: teak (also available in 4' size and with seat cushion); delivery: 6-8 weeks; price: \$2,800



5 WINDSOR BENCH BY MUNDER-SKILES

"At first glance, this is simple, but that simplicity is what makes it so lovely," Nisbet says. "The Shaker silhouette would complement a range of settings, from a luxuriant landscape to the kitchen of a beach or country house." Though Nisbet likes the finished steel, which is "chic and impervious to abuse," she'd paint it a bright color to "make it more playful." Length: 58.2"; height: 37.4"; depth: 22"; seat height: 17.5"; material: steel in natural-iron finish (other finishes and seat cushion available); delivery: 12-14 weeks; price: \$3,400



6 STREAM SHORT BENCH WITH BACK BY DEDON FROM JANUS ET CIE

"It's beautiful from every angle," says Smyth, who's a fan of its light aluminum frame. "And the tight weave is very tactile." Since it's weather resistant, "it's perfect from Maine to Miami," he says. Length: 70.75"; height: 38.75"; depth: 27.25"; seat height: 18"; material: powder-coated aluminum frame sheathed in woven Dedon fiber, in bronze with acrylic polyurethane-foam-filled cushions (also available in titanium, in other sizes, and with different cushions); delivery: 4-6 weeks; price: \$3,599, cushion: \$400 each



7 LUXEMBOURG BENCH BY FRÉDÉRIC SOFIA FOR FERMOB

"Fun, fresh, and modern," sums up Nisbet. "It comes in an array of vivid colors that would work well in a tropical garden." She imagines it poolside ("you could throw your wet bathing suit on it and not have to worry about it"), but with its industrial shape, Nisbet could also see the two-seater in the entrance or hallway of an urban apartment. Length: 43"; height: 34"; depth: 22"; seat height: 19"; material: powder-coated aluminum in orange (other colors available); delivery: 12 weeks; price: \$613



8 GATEWOOD BENCH FROM TREILLAGE

"Clearly a lot of thought went into the design," says Smyth, who observes that the lattice back recalls the timeless garden furniture of Lutyens. "I'm also really fond of the bowed arms with the X accents below." What's more, the bench features an ergonomic curved seat, and the Spanish cedar is painted in neutral hues "so it won't upstage the flowers." Length: 76.5"; height: 38.75"; depth: 23.5"; seat height: 17.5"; material: Spanish cedar in black finish (custom sizes and other finishes available); delivery: 10-12 weeks; price: \$5,800



9 BARDOLINO TWO SEAT SOFA FROM DESIGN WITHIN REACH

"The fantastic textured weave and clean lines are such a good-looking combination," remarks Nisbet of the sleek bench. "It even has a smart profile from the side, thanks to its tapered arms." She pictures it in a tidy garden or on a terrace and says it's ideal for rainy climes since "the matte finish will wear well and water won't pool up." Length: 43.5"; height: 27.25"; depth: 27.5"; seat height: 16"; material: powder-coated aluminum frame in dark-matte finish with polyethylene-fiber seat and back; delivery: 10 days; price: \$1,000



10 MONTEGO SOFA BY ROOM & BOARD

"The deep seat and generous scale make it feel more like an outdoor lounge chair than a dainty garden bench," reports Smyth, who admires its frill-free form. It's available with cushions, which is an additional benefit for the designer. "I'm always looking for a place to catch some shut-eye in the afternoon," he says. Length: 80"; height: 31"; depth: 34"; seat height: 22"; material: stainless steel and ipê wood (also available with seat and back cushions); delivery: 7-10 days; price: \$1,699

The opinions featured are those of ELLE DECOR's guest experts and do not necessarily represent those of the editors. All measurements, delivery times, and prices are approximate. For details see Resources.