

CREATING A GARDEN IN MEDITERRANEAN FRANCE

Style: You may take inspiration from the past in selecting a style but today we require spaces for living and occupying as against those to behold. Your garden has to suit you in terms of your requirements but if we simply aim for function, a garden may be convenient but will lack character. Successful gardens reflect the personality of the owner and they may reflect fashion but they do not need to be standardized. Formal or informal, traditional or contemporary and a large garden may well contain elements of each and often the juxtaposition of styles is what gives a garden its originality. Large or small, a garden should not only please the eye but lift the spirit. If you are a plantaholic, then a more informal style could accommodate an eclectic taste successfully. If you prefer a greater sense of structure, then you may well prefer a more minimalistic style – using simple architectural well placed plant forms or bold large spreads of interwoven single species.

The rule of thumb is that if your courtyard is inward looking with no view then there should be a direct connection to the style of the interior. If however, your garden has views to the landscape, then the garden should not only sit well with the architecture of the dwelling but more importantly also be in harmony with the local scenery and by incorporating this character in a smaller scale you should achieve a seamless connection. At all costs avoid superficial decoration and pastiche.

Design: The recipe for good design is combining what you have with what you mix into it. Make a wish list of what you want and then, think about what you really need. Do you want the garden to be an extension of the house during the warmer months for activities alongside the pure enjoyment of the garden and perhaps gardening? Split this list into functional items such as paths, terraces for relaxation and entertaining, water in the form of swimming pools and water catchment and maybe practical lighting. Consider also the inclusion of ramps as gardens are rarely flat. Then list the aesthetics such as opening up views (remember that most of us don't own the view) or screening, introducing a sunken area to bring interest to a bland space, planting for shade and maybe scent, water features, introducing pebble detailing within the terrace floor and, perhaps, decorative lighting. Planning long term as well as short term is recommended. Will the proposed areas continue to be useful as family lifestyles change? It's sensible to build in certain adaptability so that

you don't have to keep rethinking the approach to the garden every few years.

The functional items will probably be more of a materials expense than the aesthetics so it's important to make sure that the ergonomics have been accurately assessed. For example, it's often forgotten that space needs to be allowed for chairs to be pushed back on leaving the table and that it's necessary to carry trays on food and drink behind seated guests. So be generous with these areas. Mocking up an idea is a useful ploy before committing to major expense.





Hard materials chosen for surfaces should be local or indigenous not only for a sense of harmony but also as you may need local specialist craftsman to ensure the best finish.

Water is, and always has been, an important element in gardens. How it is contained and whether it is still or moving, formal or informal depends on its use and the style of the garden area. In this environment it should be cooling and can be absorbing and contemplative capturing moving

reflections and it will always form a focus. Water in the garden needs positioning out of a wind channel as this will cause evaporation and also affect jets and cascading features. The negative issues are obvious – maintenance is high, attractive to unwelcome insects and any shallow water can be dangerous to young children. More positively, moving water can enliven an area both visually and the sound is excellent at blocking out exterior noise.

Planting: Planting will provide enclosure and shelter or frame a view but most importantly give pleasure but, plants like humans don't stand still, they flourish and grow but can occasionally wither and die sometimes for no apparent reason. They have incredibly varied rates of growth with some only having an allotted life span of 5 to 10 years. Using small nurseries where the owner or grower is usually keen to give advice is invaluable as they care about the nurturing of their plants and where their plants will find new homes. Choosing the wrong tree, for instance, may mean that within a few years it has grown much larger than you had bargained for and has become a nuisance rather than an asset, or you realise too late that you are never going to see a specimen tree fulfil its long term potential.

Year round pleasure will be gained from plants with good form and shape – the fastigate cypress or the domed head of the olive and pine contrasted with a weeping form such as *Genista aetnensis* - as against those with a short flowering time. When grouping trees and shrubs use only a selective palette of two or three species and interplant as naturally as possible. Avoid one of this and one of that which gives a spotty and unrestful result. Interweaving your plants in groups or drifts and introducing some contrast in overall shape, leaf texture and lastly colour of foliage or flower will ensure a considered scheme throughout the year. Of course the odd punctuation of a single show stopping specimen should be interspersed as a highlight but the overall aim is fullness.

Pattern of texture comes from the leaf form and usually has a tactile quality as well as a visual one. Consider how glossy leaves contrast so well with matt foliage - the glistening plates of *Magnolia grandiflora* above a spread of *Phlomis italica* – and how grey leaved shrubs are a superb foil to flower colour.

Colour is organised by nature. Colour can be used to cool by balancing brilliant splashes in sunshine and pale colours in shade. Miss Jekyll, so masterful with colour, used strong tones in the foreground of her schemes and faded her colours - blues, pinks and whites – into the distance. This technique gives depth to planting. Avoid at all costs the bright splodge of scarlet in the furthest corner that will rivet the eye to the spot and so reduce or shorten the area visually and especially avoid a fruit salad look.

If you are impulsive by nature then think about limiting three basic flower colours – yellow, white + red - using different foliage colours in addition, or pink, blue + white perfect partners with grey + purple foliage.

It's not always easy to decide what is going to work best for you and your plot and it can be tempting to try a bit of everything. Simplicity is often the best answer however, if in doubt go for understatement rather than over statement – less is more. Every combination of person and plot is unique so seize the opportunity and make it your own.