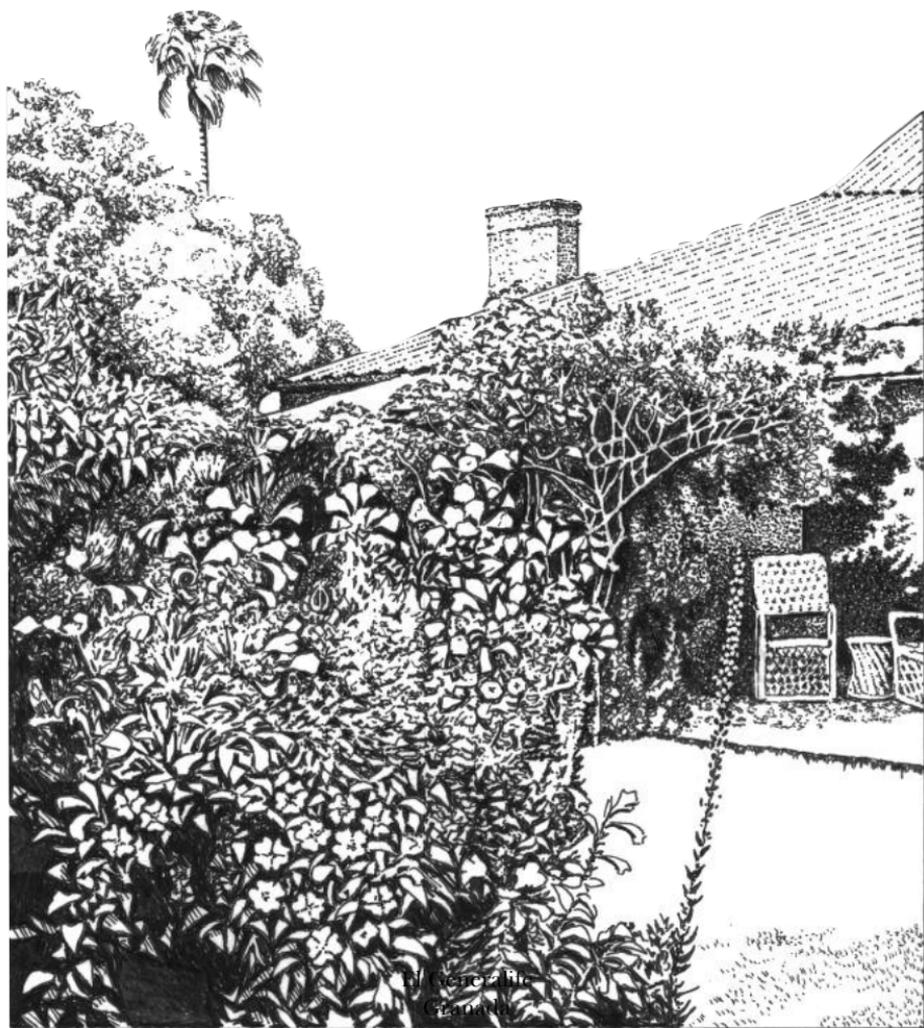
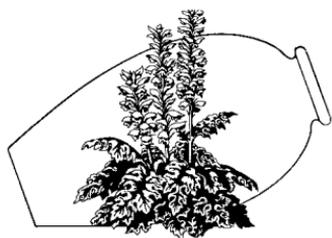


THE
Mediterranean
Garden No. 10 Autumn 1997



THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN



THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN

Published by the Mediterranean Garden Society,
PO Box 14, Peania 190 02, Greece.

Editor

Caroline Harbouri

Illustrations

Callum Macrae (p. iv), Yvonne Linardos (pp. 47), Derek Toms

We should like to thank the following for supplying photographs on which the drawings were based: Caroline Davies (cover), Flavio Zanon (p. 3) and Tom Wellsted (p. 42)

*

*

*

The Mediterranean Garden Society is a non-profit-making association which acts as a forum for everyone who has a special interest in the plants and gardens of the region. For details, please contact The Secretary, MGS, PO Box 14, Peania, 190 02 Greece.

Annual subscription:

5000 Drachmas, £15 Sterling, 25 U.S. Dollars, 30 Australian Dollars

Articles, letters, comments and items of information for *The Mediterranean Garden* should be sent to Caroline Harbouri, Kakkota 9, 145 61 Kifissia, Athens, Greece. Tel. (30-1) 8012741, Fax (30-1) 6234105.

Back numbers of the *The Mediterranean Garden* are available from The Secretary, MGS, PO Box 14, Peania, 190 02 Greece. Price per copy (incl. postage) £4.00, US\$ 7.00, Australian \$8.00, Drachmas 1,250.

*

*

*

Phototypeset by

Dimitris Mandelias

Kythnou 32

Aghia Paraskevi 153 43, Athens

Tel/Fax 6012100

Printed by

Grigoris Morogiannis

Dimokratias 255 & Gennadiou

Menidi 136 71, Athens

Tel. 2318397 Fax 2680132

Copyright of all contributions remains with their authors and creators. Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the editor or of The Mediterranean Garden Society.

ISSN 1106-5826

CONTENTS

Meditorial	1
The Villa Ariadne: An Edwardian Garden in Crete	
<i>Flavio Zanon</i>	2
The Flora of Ottoman Gardens	
I. Trees	
<i>Nicholas Stavroulakis</i>	7
Starting from Scratch in Spain...	
<i>Judith Barclay</i>	17
...And in Greece	
<i>Richard Morphy</i>	21
The Pleasures of Herb Gardening	
<i>Sue Gowmas</i>	25
Swamp Sirens – The American South's Best-Kept Secret	
<i>Tim Longville</i>	34
The Mint Bush and Allies	
<i>Tom Wellsted</i>	41
Lemons, Lemons... and... More Lemons	
<i>Helene Pizzi</i>	44
'Quats in Pots	
<i>Duncan Ackery</i>	48
Books	50
Letters	52
The Contributors	58

The cover shows *Oenothera* growing at Elizabeth Farm,
described in *TMG* No. 9.



Ano Aetos April 86

C.M.

A Corner of Lady Jeanne Sutherland's Garden at Ano Aëtos, Evia, Greece,
drawn by Callum Macrae

MEDITORIAL

Autumn in the Mediterranean is planting time. Trees, shrubs and perennials planted now can benefit from the winter rains and have a chance to start getting established before they have to face the heat and drought of summer. Seeds, especially of annuals, should also be sown now. (One of the many confusing things for gardeners who are new to a mediterranean climate is that fact that most gardening books – and many seed packets – pronounce dogmatically ‘Sow in late spring’, and while this may be good advice for a temperate climate it is not at all helpful for one where by May the rainfall will have ceased and the thermometer be nudging 35° Celsius.) If in doubt about when to perform some gardening task in a mediterranean climate, ‘do it in autumn’ is a good general rule.

Of course, the tasks that will need doing depend on the kind of garden in question. In this issue Flavio Zanon tells us about a quintessentially Mediterranean garden created at the beginning of the century by an Englishman. Judith Barclay and Richard Morphy describe the making of gardens at opposite ends of the Mediterranean, dealing with the problem of poor soil that is common to Spain and Greece. Sue Goumas lists many of the aromatic plants so perfectly adapted to this region – thriving in hot sun, unfussy about poor soil, undemanding of water and constant attention. Perhaps the ‘garden’ is a collection of pots on a terrace – and Duncan Ackery and Helene Pizzi both tell us about growing citrus fruit in pots and enjoying the culinary results.

Nevertheless, human nature being what it is, gardeners sometimes hanker for something different, something flamboyant or challenging perhaps. The challenge may be growing acid-lovers in areas of alkaline soil, or shady moisture-lovers in hot, bright sunlight; common sense may tell us that it can’t really be done, ecological correctness may tell us that it shouldn’t really be done – yet we still want to give it a try! And Tim Longville suggests just such a challenge for Mediterranean gardeners: those sirens of the swamp, lovers of damp at their feet and heat at their heads, the Louisiana irises.

THE VILLA ARIADNE: AN EDWARDIAN GARDEN IN CRETE

Flavio Zanon

In 1900 Sir Arthur Evans began to excavate the Minoan palace of Knossos which lies a few kilometres to the south-east of Iraklion, Crete. Those were the days of lordly gestures and supreme self-confidence: in order to excavate, Evans actually purchased the site. Thus it is not so surprising that in 1906 he decided to build a house for himself at Knossos on the slopes overlooking the newly revealed palace, and very rapidly the Villa Ariadne came into being. Dilys Powell has described it as being “stubbornly Victorian in the Mediterranean”; it was at any rate designed with the hot Cretan summers in mind, the bedrooms being at semi-basement level for coolness, the living rooms on the slightly raised ground floor. It was constructed in a rather unusual manner – as photographs show – for whereas normally the walls are constructed first and the door and window frames put in subsequently, the Villa Ariadne was built the other way round: Evans brought the door and window frames (along with door handles, hinges etc) from England, had them set in place with timber supports, and then proceeded to have the walls constructed. The quality of these English doors and windows is evident today – a tribute to Edwardian workmanship. The Villa Ariadne stands solid and firm, an uncompromising, stone-built, flat-roofed house.

When the Germans invaded Crete in May 1941 they took over the Villa Ariadne to serve as their headquarters and behind the north-west boundary of its garden built two air-raid shelters. Later the villa passed into the hands of the British School of Archaeology, by whom it was recently donated to the Greek State to be used in summer by visiting archaeologists working on the site of Knossos and the nearby so-called Villa Dionysus.

In May 1995 the East Crete branch of the Greek Chamber of Architects organised a conference on the problems involved in the maintenance of historic monuments, during which the

author of this article presented a brief description of the Villa Ariadne's garden, its problems, and the restoration and maintenance work it requires. This was the first time that a garden had been recognised in Greece as being a historic monument.



The path to the main entrance

We have no information on whether it was Evans himself who created the garden, approximately half a hectare in extent, that surrounds the Villa Ariadne. Nor do we know much about its original planting, though certainly some of the trees – for example the cypress trees (*Cupressus sempervirens*, *C. sempervirens* f. *horizontalis*) along the north-west boundary, the venerable palm trees in front of the house, and several pines – must date from the first years of the century. What is clear, however, is that the garden was always Mediterranean in character: a place of shady walks along paths made of pebbles set in concrete rather than an English garden of lawns and borders. The sitting area – in which to enjoy the coolness of evening after a long hot day, and to dine perhaps, surrounded by the scent of jasmine (*Jasminum azoricum*, *J. officinale*) – would have been on one of the two roof terraces rather than in the

garden itself. Thus trees dominate the garden. In front of the house on the left hand side are three large pine trees (*Pinus canariensis*) and several palms (*Phoenix canariensis* and *Washingtonia filifera*) on the right. The palms are planted within a large, irregular oval-shaped border, edged with *Pittosporum tobira*; between pines and palms – in pride of place, directly opposite the entrance steps to the house – stands a headless statue of the Emperor Hadrian. Two old specimens of *Schinus molle*, the pepper tree, struggle to survive, in poor shape these days, beneath the shade of the encroaching palms.

Water is of course the *sine qua non* of gardens in a mediterranean climate, and provision for watering was made in the form of a large cistern to collect winter rain linked to a series of irrigation channels which meandered through the garden. Subsequent alterations at an unspecified date mean that these channels are no longer connected to the cistern. Towards the eastern corner of the garden Evans made a bathing pool in the 1920s for relaxation after the hot and dusty endeavours of archaeology; this is rectangular in shape, with seats constructed beneath water level at two diagonally opposite corners. These days it lies empty. Curving around the outermost side of this pool is a pergola on which grow three extremely large old specimens of the magenta *Bougainvillea glabra* ‘Sanderiana’; a similarly old bougainvillea covers the pergola leading into the site of the Minoan palace of Knossos, and to judge from their gnarled trunks – approximately four handspans in diameter – these may well date from the original planting of the garden. Almost certainly of the same date are the two large specimens of *Trachycarpus fortunei* that grow just behind the bougainvillea. It is said that the specimens of *Plumbago capensis* [now *P. auriculata*] planted along the north-east boundary of the garden are of a similar age. Neither bougainvillea nor plumbago is of course native to the Mediterranean, yet they do well with little water and have thus become familiar ‘Mediterranean’ plants – their venerable age and size in the garden of the Villa Ariadne are clear proof of how happy they are in this climate and of how they thrive without any attention. Other climbers, probably planted more recently, are *Lonicera caprifolium*, *Tecomaria capensis* [now *Tecoma capensis*] and a *Macfadyena unguis-cati* [now *Dolichandra*

unguis-cati] growing up the Villa to the left of the front door, smothered in canary-yellow trumpet flowers in early summer.

Behind the house, to the south west is a small enclosed garden, the so-called *perivoli* or productive garden. Today it mainly contains various citrus trees and sage (*Salvia officinalis*). More citrus trees are planted along the south-west to south-east boundary of the garden and it is probable that originally the land lying beyond this boundary was given over to the cultivation of citrus fruit, thus providing visual continuity to the garden. Visual – and tangible – continuity is provided today along the north-western edges of the garden by the giant reeds (*Arundo donax*) which are progressively invading from the surrounding countryside.

This is an old garden, and it is beginning to show signs of its age and of the benign neglect to which it has been subjected. There are few perennial plants extant in it today – a careful register of all the plants in the garden made in 1995 lists only *Acanthus mollis*, *Pelargonium peltatum*, *Iris florentina*, *Zantedeschia aethiopica* and *Clerodendron fragrans* [now *C. chinense*], as well as *Aloe arborescens* and *Yucca brevifolia* among the succulents and xerophytes. Fashions in plants – as well as in everything else – come and go, and it would be interesting to know what else was originally planted here that has not withstood the passing of the years. Perhaps a study of Sir Arthur Evans's correspondence from the time when the garden was first created might offer some clues.

However, the need for restoration and management of the garden is becoming more urgent. One of the main problems (encountered in gardens everywhere) is that plants which do well self-seed rampantly. In the garden of the Villa Ariadne this is especially true of the palms, *Phoenix canariensis* being perhaps the chief offender. Thus quite a lot of clearing of the dense undergrowth of self-sown trees is required, since they are progressively depriving their parents of nutrients as well as all other plants of light. The services of a good tree surgeon are needed; several of the older pines, including *Pinus brutia* (more common in Crete than *P. pinea*) as well as the *P. canariensis* mentioned above, are burdened with a weight of dead branches that is not doing them any good. Myrtle (*Myrtus*

communis) and pittosporums would benefit from some radical pruning. The repairing of the irrigation channels and their reconnection to the cistern would not only provide water to various parts of the garden but would help restore something of the original feel of the place – for after all, what could be more evocative of an old Mediterranean garden than the sound of water gently flowing among the patterns of light and shade on a hot day?

The garden of the Villa Ariadne has seen generations of archaeologists come and go. Let us hope that it will receive the care it needs so that many more generations will continue to enjoy it.



Trachycarpus fortunei

THE FLORA OF OTTOMAN GARDENS

I. TREES

Nicholas Stavroulakis

It is not excessively difficult to grasp some sense of Ottoman taste as it expressed itself in gardens and the plants chosen to fill them. A cursory reading of some of the accounts of travellers to Turkey in the 16th and 17th centuries provides descriptions of costumes, the interiors of some of the mosques they were permitted to enter or even, on occasion, a glimpse of a domestic interior or, more awesomely, an audience with the Sultan or a presence at one of his great *alays* (Imperial processions that occurred each Friday when the Sultan would make his way in silent majesty to one of the mosques of the city for the noon prayer), or the transference of the court from Istanbul to Edirne in the spring and fall, or, more frighteningly, the movement of the army with the Sultan to some rallying point in preparation for war. There is also a still badly edited wealth of manuscript material, much of it finely illustrated and illuminated, as well as the *Divans* and mystical poetry rich in floral and arboreal imagery.

Ubiquitous in Turkish life is its strange sense of association with nature. It is not surprising that the Turks experimented assiduously with tiles and various colours and glazes until they had achieved the marvel of Iznik ceramics in which scarlet and the use of delayed firing permitted natural forms to be expressed – a far cry from the rigid geometric forms of High Islamic art. One might also mention the Turkey carpets and kilims that create veritable gardens of flowers to be sat amongst.

In the following listing the trees have been specifically selected from among those found traditionally in Ottoman gardens from the 16th to the late 18th centuries in order to be able to survive the more arduous winter climate of the location of the Missouri Botanical Garden. Sadly, the cypress – almost an essential in an Ottoman landscape – will have to be omitted.

Celtis australis Nettle Tree Isirgan Ağacı

At one time quite common in gardens along the Bosphorus. (It was well known in antiquity and Homer claimed that people who ate of it lost all memory of their homeland.)

Cercis siliquastrum Judas Tree Erguvan

This, like many of the trees in this listing, was once found all along the Bosphorus. Sadly most have vanished (which makes the Ottoman Garden Project of even greater importance insofar as it will provide at least an authentic context in which many of the trees and plants common at one time in Istanbul will cohabit). It is almost completely covered along its branches with dense pink to magenta flowers. Very hardy but likes sun.

Citrus Lemon Limon

Should it be possible to create a *limonluk* (hothouse), there are several varieties of citrus fruits that can be grown. Specific species can be determined later.

Cupressus Cypress Selvi

Two main types appear as an important if not ubiquitous tree in Ottoman (and Persian) gardens. *C. sempervirens* f. *horizontalis* resembles a pine tree and tends to spread itself out. *C. sempervirens* is dark, tall and elegant. Greek and Armenian Christians had a certain dislike for the latter due to the fact that great groves of them could occasionally be found in Turkish cemeteries. There was a time when it was common to plant a *C. sempervirens* at the death of a husband, father or son. There is a tradition that they symbolize the perfect Muslim who stands erect, with dignity, and whose head is sensitive to each breath of God's will. They provide elegant standards along paths and cohabit well with rosemary which breaks the leggishness of the trees when planted along a path. The two forms planted in clumps together make a dense background and are good for masking and creating background cover.

Diospyros kaki Chinese Persimmon Trabzon Humasi

The Chinese Persimmon is known in general under the name of Trabzon Humasi in Turkish and at times this name is given to another species, *D. lotus*, the Date Plum. Both are hardy, but only the Chinese Persimmon is really edible, the other (the Date Plum) occasionally bearing violet-coloured fruits. Male and female trees are required in order to produce fruit. The inclusion of *D. kaki* is desirable in the garden as it is very striking in fall when the leaves drop and the long, almost black, branches are hung with golden orange coloured fruits. (They also attract birds.)

Elaeagnus angustifolia Wild Olive İğide

A willow-like tree and once found very commonly in Bosphorus gardens. Hardy.

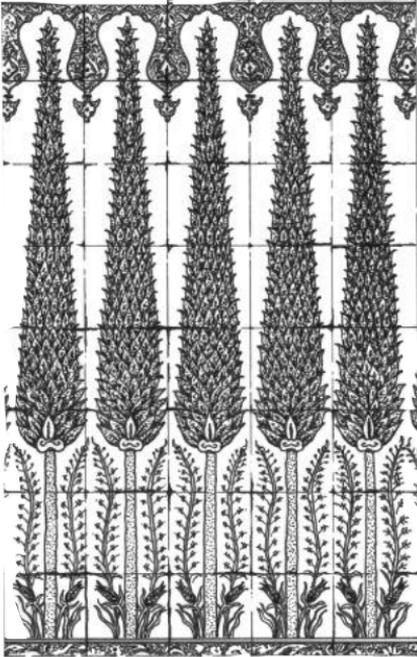
Eriobotrya japonica Loquat Yenidunya

As its name ('New World') in Turkish indicates, this is an introduced tree. It arrived in Turkey in the early 19th century and rapidly became quite popular.

Ficus Fig İncir

There are a great number of varieties of figs and their inclusion in an Ottoman garden is essential as they provide rich contrasting texture and can also be vigorously pruned and trained. They have a distinct problem in terms of their sexual life as they must be matched and require pollination. Several varieties are established in the US and it may well be that a choice can be made from among these. The Smyrna or Izmir fig has rich violet fruit and will quirkosely only accept pollination by a small fig wasp (*Blastophaga psenes*) in a process know as caprifigation. Such wasps were accidentally introduced into California in the late 19th century and are now co-workers with fig growers. The hardiest trees (they can handle Istanbul winters) are Marabout, Calimyra, San Piero (Brown

Turkey), Adriatic and Grosse Verte (all with different sized, flavoured and coloured fruit). Caprification increases the yield and size of figs. *Blastophaga psenes* are not aggressive... but may be a deterrent. Their absence only means more modest fruit or occasionally none at all.



Decorated tiles with tree and flower motifs in the Topkapı Harem, built for Sultan Ahmed III. 18th Century

Cydonia? oblonga Quince Ayva
C. sinensis [now *Chaenomeles sinensis*]

These are hardy fruit trees and bear exquisitely scented fruits that are used for making sweets (they are rock hard and quite bitter to taste when uncooked). As the fruit figures so very often in Ottoman cuisine, it is essential that they be in the garden.

Laurus nobilis Laurel, Bay Defne

These are important trees as they have an ancient presence in gardens going back to antiquity. They are evergreen and two

varieties usually appear in Ottoman gardens – the straight-leaved laurel and the variegated-leaved laurel. Both are used in cooking. They make excellent backing in a garden for masking unsightly areas. They also tend to run races with other trees or buildings and thus grow fairly rapidly.

Magnolis × soulangeana Magnolia Manolya

The shores of the Bosphorus were once covered with great magnolia trees and their inclusion in an Ottoman garden is important.

Malus Apple Elma

There are many varieties of apple trees to be chosen from, all native to Turkey.

Melia azedarach Persian Lilac Tespi Ağacı
Chinaberry Tree

In the spring it bears very beautiful and fragrant clusters of star-like flowers, white but also at times pale violet. The fruits appear in late summer and are orange-coloured, ripening to nut brown, and are about the size of rosary beads, hence the name in Turkish, ‘rosary tree’. They become quite tall and one can still determine where a dervish, especially Mevlevi, *tekke* or convent was by their presence. The fruits never become hard enough to make rosary beads, however. This tree has somewhat sparse foliage.

Morus White and Black Mulberry Dut
(*M. alba* & *M. nigra*)

These can be quite messy trees as the fruit drops indiscriminately on both pavements and people and, in the case of *M. nigra*, aggressively stains anything it falls on. They give dense shade and little survives beneath them. They were usually planted in larger open gardens. One advantage is that both species appear to enjoy vigorous pruning. The black mulberry

has edible fruit; the white mulberry was introduced from China, probably in the 6th century, and is the source of nourishment for silkworms during their larval stage. The fruit is not edible.

Nerium oleander Oleander Zakkum

There are several varieties, all hardy, and bearing different-coloured flowers – magenta red, white, pink, peach and yellow. They handle winters well and have a long flowering season. They are, of course, quite poisonous which may be a detrimental point, though there are corners in the garden plan which would put them out of reach if included. They also enjoy pruning and can be cut back to form medium-sized bushes or allowed to reach tree proportions. They can be very effective as masking plants in certain areas.

Picea Spruce Ladin

There are several varieties that can be chosen from with regard to density and hues of foliage.

Pinus maritima* & *P. pinea Pine Çam
[now *P. halepensis*]

Not as popular as the cypress in Ottoman gardens, though occasionally found. They grow quite tall and hence need a good distance to be appreciated. They are quite dramatic as seen growing on some of the islands of the Sea of Marmara.

Pistacia terebinthus Turpentine Tree Sakız Ağacı

Once quite common in Istanbul along the land walls to the west of the city, perhaps due to the fact that Greek and Armenian cemeteries are located nearby and the tree was very often planted in them. Not too common, but occasionally found in Ottoman gardens as a breaker. It has the disadvantage of not being averse to having its progeny take root in other trees.

Platanus orientalis

Plane Tree

Çenar

The *Çenar* has an intense presence, symbolism and long association not only with Ottoman and Persian gardens but well back into antiquity. Its hand-like leaves were considered prophylactic symbols of the Mother Goddess; after the coming of Islam the association was appropriated as the Hand of Allah. Plane trees grow fairly rapidly (especially if induced to overtake the height of any neighbouring structure or tree). Like the cypress, the plane tree is an essential element in a garden and appreciates pools and fountains. In Ottoman times it was customary to plant a plane tree on the birth of a son as a sympathetic act to bring long life and health. It is still considered to be a holy tree and there are many very ancient plane trees in villages and urban neighbourhoods. It is quite usual to find that an entire street has been detoured in order to go round one of these. In Eyup there are several under which women pray and on occasion cut off strips of garments to hang on the tree afterwards. In the plan I have marked a spot at the entrance to the garden complex where a plane tree should be planted to provide shade and protection and to establish mood.

Populus alba

White Poplar

Piramit, Titrek,
Kavak

An important tree in every respect. Its graceful shape, movements in wind and the sound of its leaves like running water made it very much part of an Ottoman landscape. It also grows well and its only drawback is that it loses its leaves in fall.

Prunus*Prunus persica*

Peach

Şeftalı

Prunus armeniaca

Apricot

Kayısı / Zerdalı

Prunus dulcis

Almond

Badem

Prunus cerasus

Cherry

Karayemiş

Prunus cerasifera

Cherry Plum/

Kıraz

Myrobalan

(This can also be used as a shrub as it is modest in growth – also has brilliant coloured fruit.)

Prunus domestica

Damson

Murdum

These are essential to an Ottoman garden as they have varying times of blooming in the spring, starting with the almond. The blossoms are quite distinct in colouring and as the fruit ripens this also assumes quite distinct colours. Two forms of cherry trees were highly prized and can still be found in Turkey, one with a scarlet fruit and the other having amber-coloured fruits. All can be pruned happily and can be trained to modest and controllable proportions. All of the fruits were valued for making sweets or being eaten as they are. The almond called *acilbadem* especially is eaten before it ripens on the tree, in its green adolescent form. Damsons make a magnificent show in the spring and their deep violet fruits contrast sharply with pears, apricots, peaches, etc.

Punica granatum

Pomegranate

Nar

This is an important tree in an Ottoman garden and highly appreciated for its brilliant foliage, bright jewel-like vermilion buds in spring, glowing fruit in autumn and delicious seeds that can be eaten well into the winter or made into important syrups that are used in cooking. There are a number of varieties in the region of Istanbul (and elsewhere) that survive intense winters and snow. There are also a number of different sub-species that vary in size of fruit, colour and usefulness for making different syrups – sweet or sour – used for flavouring stews or decorating sweets.

Pyrus

Pear

Armut

There are many varieties of pear to choose from, but that most often seen in Turkey is *P. amygdaliformis* which produces quite small brown fruits.

Quercus

Oak

Meşe

Several types of oaks were included in gardens, some more suitable for large open gardens, others for smaller intimate

spaces. *Q. aegilops*, *Q. pubescens* and *Q. coccifera* are 'modest' in size. *Q. coccifera* is still a collecting spot for the cochineal bug from which one of the richest scarlet dyes is derived. *Q. castaneifolia* and *Q. cerris* are large trees and slow-growing (as are most oaks).

Tamarix

Tamarisk

Ilgin

Evergreen and extremely hardy. Good for masking but somewhat difficult to manage in a small garden. They were very often used as windbreaks. They can suffer considerable abuse and are also shallow-rooted and appear to propagate quite happily when thrown down by a heavy wind. Within a few months even broken parts of the trunk sprout new shoots.

Ziziphus

Jujube

Hunnab

Usually found in two varieties, *Z. jujuba* and *Z. lotus*. The former was very often found near coffee shops but was also used as a decorative tree in gardens as the fruit ripens into brilliant yellow. The leaves also provide good shade. Easily pruned and managed.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH IN SPAIN...

Judith Barclay

When we moved into our house in Cadiz on the south west coast of Spain, our garden, once part of the pine wood planted in the 18th century to provide much-needed timber for the shipbuilding industry, had been turned into what appeared to be a rubbish dump. Builders must be notorious worldwide for their skills in destruction. We had been left with a handful of stone pines, *Pinus pinea*, and cork oaks, *Quercus suber*, amidst piles of aggregate, with the odd crocus bravely pushing its way up through the rubble. The scrub of the former pine woods had survived happily in a shallow layer of leaf mould, protected from the elements it had no need of a deep layer of topsoil. But even this had gone with the builders. All that remained was a hard layer of red clay that turned to rock in the summer. Hence the name of the district – ‘La Barrosa’ from the Spanish word for clay, *barro*.

I was determined to restore the damage and wanted a natural garden with as many autochthonous species as possible, in order to recreate a habitat for the little wildlife that remained. Exposed to the hot summer sun, torrential rain in the autumn, the occasional frost in winter and vicious easterly winds that can blow for days on end, it was not going to be an easy task.

In haste we set about improving the soil by digging in as much organic matter as possible. We make our own compost, which provides a rich dark humus that helps to break up the clay as well as providing valuable nutrients. While waiting for the first load of compost to mature we used goat manure and leaf mould. Plants slowly began to flourish, and patches of bare soil were disappearing. Then came the end of the drought and the heavens opened. Lavender, thyme, salvia, cistus rotted in waterlogged soils, topsoils were washed away and plants vanished down gaping holes as subsidence occurred. Back to square one, but after a lesson well learned: a little more patience, observation and study beforehand could have saved much time and effort later. We made deep gravel drainage

ditches, dug in heaps more compost to improve soil structure and replanted the more vulnerable species in areas we now knew to be safe from flooding. Mulches of pine needles, bark or gravel were spread to protect against erosion and leaching, as well as to conserve water in the drier months.

The wet weather provided the answer to one puzzle however – where were the worms? In all the digging we came across not a single worm. Did earthworms not live in Andalusia? We consulted a local worm expert who explained that Spanish worms were solitary creatures and therefore difficult to find – we weren't convinced. We considered importing worms from another area of Spain but this seemed to go against our idea of a natural garden. At the end of the first year there was great excitement – a big fat juicy worm. It was carefully placed in a shady area with lots of detritus and needless to say disappeared forever. And so we continued for the next two years until the drought ended. After 40 days of non-stop torrential rain and heavy flooding we finally solved the mystery. In the hot dry summers the worms burrow deep down into the clay and only after the rains do they surface in order to avoid drowning in the waterlogged soil. Worms now abound, even breeding in the doormats in the really wet weather.

With nurseries here offering little in the way of native shrubs, we salvaged many plants from the building sites, a method which proved quite successful provided the plants were transplanted after the first rains in autumn. *Cistus palhinhae* (a sticky species with magnificent large white tissue paper flowers and glossy leaves) grows in nothing along the cliff-tops and moved happily to our hard clay in full sun but objects strongly to being watered; *Cistus salvifolius* (a low-growing species with wrinkly leaves and white flowers) provides good ground cover; *Halimium halimifolium* [now *Cistus halimifolius*] (the silvery leaves being almost as attractive as the yellow flowers), *Myrtus communis*, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *Lavandula stoechas*, *Teucrium fruticans* were all successfully transferred to a lighter soil with some shade. *Cistus ladanifer*, struck from a cutting, grew into a handsome three-metre shrub in as many years, flowering continually from February

to June. Perennials such as *Anagallis monelli* [now *Lysimachia monelli*] (with brilliant blue flowers), Sweet Alison (*Lobularia maritima* – sweet-scented white flowers) and Storksbill (*Erodium primulaceum* – pink flowers) provide colour in the spring.



Ericephalus africanus

This is not to say that the local nurseries have not benefited from our custom, providing a variety of jasmines, hibiscus and aromatic plants including the more unusual but highly prolific South African cotton bush, *Ericephalus africanus*, looking like a fleshier version of *Lavandula stoechas* but with small cream-coloured daisies, and giving off a strong perfume as you brush past. A bougainvillea that had lived sadly in a pot on my previous terrace for five years without ever producing a single bloom shows its appreciation of the move with prolific growth, leaves of up to 15cm in length, and continuous clusters of purple bracts, needing nothing more than a good pruning in

winter and a thick layer of leaf mould. Honeysuckle, *Lonicera* spp., grows exceptionally well, striking easily from softwood cuttings in open ground, and providing food and shelter for much of the wildlife.

In the first few years we were constantly at war with aphids and caterpillars. Not wanting to use pesticides, I was prepared to try any home remedy. Every time I saw a ladybird I would carefully carry it home, in the hope that it would make a meal of the aphids; unfortunately I suspect that more often they provided a meal for the birds. We tried planting *Limnanthes douglasii* to attract hoverflies; it produced beautiful poached eggs for a couple of weeks and then fried to nothing in the heat. Finally I agreed to use a dilute solution of Fairy Liquid which kept the aphids at bay but only with frequently repeated doses. The caterpillars, usually only spotted once the worst damage had been done, were carefully picked off by hand and deposited in the wood with a generous supply of leaves in the vain hope that some would metamorphose.

Now, happier healthy plants tend to mean fewer attacks and a richer variety of insect life, with leaf-cutting bees making pretty patterns in the flowers of the bougainvillea, woodlice galore, monster bee-like creatures that buzz past terrifying the unknowing visitor, and swallowtail butterflies that are particularly attracted to parsley and fennel. Dragonflies, ladybirds and beetles appear in a range of spectacular colours, and although the occasional attack of greenfly occurs, on the whole an equilibrium seems to have been reached. The bird population has also increased considerably, with resident families of swallows conducting flying lessons from the TV aerial, blackbirds who divebomb the cat if he dares to stroll too close, a greenfinch whose morning chorus cheers everyone, and tree creepers scuttling along branches, although we are still waiting for an owl to apply for lodgings. Vegetation has increased sufficiently to provide a range of microclimates, proportioning shade and shelter from the sun and wind as well as helping to reduce water loss in the hot summers. Nevertheless we are still a long way from reaching the perfect equilibrium of the former woods – will it ever be possible, I wonder?

...AND IN GREECE



Cistus parviflorus

Richard Morphy

In 1970 I threw up an engineering background in the UK to become a shipping agent in Piraeus. In the UK my gardening experience was limited to maintaining existing gardens and growing a few vegetables. I looked forward to an easier life in rented property in Athens; no more lawn mowing and leaf sweeping, I thought, and so it transpired in the main, although I did have some small gardens to maintain, lawn watering being the chief problem.

In 1985, after much fruitless questing for a suitable weekend cottage outside Athens, I bought eight *stremmata* (about two acres) of rough land on which to build near Porto Heli in the Peloponnese, opposite the island of Spetses. The plot spanned a small valley containing an old olive grove and sheep pens, the rocky high ground on which we were to build backed on to pine woods, providing a view including a large section of coastal plain from Ermioni and Hydra around to Spetses. So far so good.

The excavations for the house tore into the hillside exposing compacted stony chalk aggregate where it wasn't solid rock. The builder provided retaining walls where appropriate and in-filled behind them with the usual red 'topsoil' – at least an improvement on the remaining bleakly scarred hillside. The 'valley' section where the sheep pens had been looked more promising but was remote from the water reservoir (55 CBM) built under the house, which collects rainwater from the roof and is topped up by road tanker in the summer.

For the first few years we were weekenders only and concentrated on trying to cover the ugly bare surroundings to the house, with aspects facing mainly south and east, much of it subject to day-long sun without shade. For guidance I had little to go on except observation of the plants that appeared to thrive in the Athens suburbs with little attention and the roadside survivors spotted on the regular weekly drive down. The red topsoil areas were quickly taken up with a variety of succulents, palm, fig, geranium/pelargonium, oleander – anything ready to hand and tough enough to become established over one winter with once-a-week watering the following summer. The inaccessibly steep east slope was quickly covered with aptenia and carpobrotus, left to fight it out in an effort to prevent erosion and provide year-round greenery. Roses performed reasonably in partial shade, giving profuse bloom in spring and autumn (we no longer water them directly in summer).

For the stony aggregate it was a matter of testing with a pickaxe. If the point penetrated and the stones could be eased out, there was a possible planting site. Figs loved this and I also succeeded with white mulberry (seedlings from Athens both); privet (bought) has survived but *Genista monosperma* [now *Retama monosperma*], innocently bought as shrubs, shot up into tree form: full marks for drought/rock resistance but I have had to resort to savage pruning to keep them in bounds. New seedlings have been planted much further apart and are being trained as trees from the start. *Parkinsonia aculeata* (from the roadside, near Corinth) have also predictably prospered (and seeded). *Agave americana* and *sisalana* (ex-pot) have proved too aggressive to have near the house and have been removed with great effort. The *A. sisalana* flowered spectacularly after a few years but threatened the telephone line and had to come down. The variegated *A. americana* is much less fierce and more decorative; regular hacking out of off-shoots is necessary and the base leaves can be cut to produce a palm-like stem.

Mistakes include a giant branching cactus with 5 cm spines (ex-waste ground), too horrific to be identified in my genteel reference books. Introduced in pieces from a potted parent and encouraged by watering, in a few years each grew to 2m

high by 2m across and spreading. Impossible to approach, they took a long-handled pick-mattock to bring down and about 40 wheelbarrow loads to cart away. Then to be dowsed in diesel oil as every piece falling to the ground would root. Beware. It was also a mistake to plant citrus on rocky slopes, hoping for decorative effect; half are barely surviving even with regular watering and sympathy.

The common yuccas are indestructible, any off-cuts taking root with a splash of the hosepipe. But beware the deadly 'bayonet'. Aloes have been successful, except that the *A. vera* does not like full sun, in common with some 'ice-plant' variants; it has surprised me that some succulents prefer a degree of shade.

Having largely retired from Athens after 1993, I have been able to give more attention to propagation of my own cuttings and seedlings, taken mainly from the wild or by exchange with friends. Other useful sources of seed include historical sites and public gardens. Among items successfully transferred are: Judas tree (transplanted seedling, also from seed), *Euphorbia characias*, *E. dendroides* and *E. rigida*, *Ferula communis*, *Cistus creticus*, *C. parviflorus* and *C. monspeliensis*, *Phlomis fruticosa*, *Iris unguicularis*, *Spartium junceum* (all transplanted), *Datura metel*, *Colutea arborescens*, *Medicago arborea* (all from seed). Still trying: *Vitex agnus-castus* (cuttings fail), *Nicotiana glauca* (hates moving). None of these requires any attention once established (except *Datura*: some water).

In due course I turned my attention to the 'valley' section, which had been left to the fine old olive trees with some carob and the inevitable mastic – the last have been allowed to spread in the absence of sheep and have become immense sprawling clumps of up to 10m in diameter where space permits; everlasting green is the reward. The land is terraced with old low stone walls which have preserved a good depth of clayish silt, 'modified' in the area that had held the sheep pen, and I decided to try for a small citrus grove in one section. It has been hard work in the face of sun and clay and I am now trying wider plating wells, addition of compost, mulch and iron chelate, as per the books. Twenty blood oranges from one small tree only planted for two years was an unusual reward.

Sadly, a near catastrophic attack of leaf miner has threatened citrus trees in this region. A remedy is still being sought*.

My father bought an old house (circa 1890?) in Patras in the '50s with the remains of an ornamental garden of some age, judging by the size of the trees. There is a *Cycas revoluta* nearly 3m high from which I have planted out a very healthy off-cut of over 1m in diameter. Also from this source I have planted out seedlings of a catalpa (huge deeply-lobed leaves) which I hope will provide some necessary shade around the 'orchard' in due course. There is also a large pecan tree producing excellent nuts which failed as a seedling here – probably too dry, but I want to try again. *Melia azedarach* though has transferred well. Other seedlings in that pipeline include *Robinia pseudoacacia* and *Ailanthus altissima* for speed, shade and drought resistance.

Eucalyptus has already proved its worth, one specimen reaching about 15m in 10 years and an *Acacia dealbata* of the same age has to be cut back by about 30% every year, having been split down the middle by the weight of foliage in a storm. For further decoration small specimens of *Albizia julibrissin* (a brute to train upright), *Caesalpinia gilliesii* and *Koelreuteria paniculata* are on the way.

Bougainvillea originally raced away, growing two storeys in height in two years; then several years of drought put them into hibernation. After two years of good winter rain they are now on the move again and in brilliant colour. Later specimens less exposed to the sun have done far better. One has even recovered from being broken down and trampled underfoot during house painting to span a large west-facing wall in five years.

Apart from the broom varieties introduced, I have left those originally surviving the building onslaught, trimming the low growing dome-shaped ones with difficulty, even with a powered hedge-trimmer, but an evergreen drought-proof shrub covered with yellow blossom in May is worth having. The taller spiny broom I trim to small tree shape where nothing else will grow; although they do not look much during hibernation in the summer they are briefly attractive in the spring.

* But see Richard Dight's article in *TMG* No. 4 (ed).

THE PLEASURES OF HERB GARDENING

Sue Goumas

I have always had a fascination with herbs. It could be because of a fragrance remembered. For me there is nothing to compare with the antiseptic aroma of lavender provided by the plant's leaves and flowers. Or my enjoyment could come from my using dried herbs in the many wreaths I create. On the other hand, it might be from tidbits of information that I have picked up through the years, such as planting basil near tomatoes to enhance the latter's flavour or using chamomile as a hair rinse to accentuate blond highlights. However even if these reasons didn't exist, I could find a second reason for growing them – and that would be for their own incredible variety of colours, textures and shapes. But a third and perhaps most important justification for one who gardens in the Mediterranean region is that a careful selection of herbs can provide plants that adapt well to the local climate, needing minimal maintenance and little additional watering. Now that summer is upon us, this advantage is even more apparent to me than when I began this article back in the winter.

Until recently I have had my herbs scattered throughout the garden. I had some lavender by the main entrance, rosemary by the kitchen door, oregano and mint in the vegetable garden. Now, while I still might have a herb tucked here and there, I have devoted an area exclusively for the growing of herbs. It is my garden within a garden.

A garden within a garden

My garden is located 150 metres from the sea outside Patras, Greece. The prevailing west wind does not affect me, but the dry north-east wind that comes ripping down through the mountains removes every last drop of moisture from the thin soil. Although this wind blows for maybe a total of 30 days a year, I had to take it into account when planning the garden. My first line of defence is a hedge of privet followed by the creation of protected niches in the garden. It is in such a niche that I have created my herb garden which measures

approximately four metres by four metres. It is bordered on one side by a stone bed, on the opposite side by a shrub border, backed by a row of bay and tansy and fronted by a lawn. The area was paved with old bricks in a herringbone pattern with more or less square spaces left to be planted in. The gaps range from 30cm by 30cm for smaller plants to 50cm by 50cm for the larger specimens. Originally I had planned to combine rectangular spaces but these proved awkward. The 30cm wide brick paths which surround each opening set off one plant from the other. They also allow me to weed the spaces without compacting the soil. This garden is the first thing that I see as I step out of my kitchen door. It is here I go to find the sprig of rosemary for my lamb, the handful of lemon balm leaves for some tea or the lavender flowers for a potpourri.

In quest of the perfect herb

Since I laid out the area for the herb garden I have been on a quest to find appropriate herbs for planting. In the spaces I found that I wanted herbs which exhibit as many of the following characteristics as possible: are non-invasive, mound nicely, take kindly to pruning, offer a variety of textures and colours, are perennial, and are evergreen or evergrey. Herbs which do not exhibit most of these characteristics but which are nevertheless desirable are planted outside the paved area, either directly in the ground or in pots.

Plants which grow in the spaces include:

Allium schoenoprasum

Chives are native to Greece. They grow to 30cm with fine, hollow leaves and round pink flower heads with papery bracts in summer. Chives multiply rapidly to form compact clumps. Dies back in the winter. Garlic chives (*A. tuberosum*) have white flower heads.

Propagation: Seeds or divide bulblets.

Uses: Culinary as flavouring in soups and salads. Immerse flowers of *A. schoenoprasum* in white wine vinegar for a fine-flavoured pink vinegar.

Chrysanthemum parthenium [now *Tanacetum parthenium*]

Feverfew is a bushy hardy perennial native to central and southern Europe which reaches a height of 60cm. It has aromatic, divided rounded leaves which persist through mild winters and pretty daisy flowers blooming from late spring to fall. Propagation: Seeds or divide root.

Uses: Tea is said to cure headaches; used in dried arrangements.

Lavandula

Lavender is a highly fragrant shrubby evergreen perennial from Southern Europe. It has narrow leaves and spikes of scented flowers. It is the only herb that I grow for its flowers, which range from lavender to purple. It needs to be planted in a sunny well-drained position. There are many species and varieties. In my garden I have planted a variety that is locally available in nurseries. I assume that it is a form of a *Lavandula* species. It grows to about 80cm and sends up long spikes of purple flowers in June and July. I also have a diminutive form of lavender which I grew from seed as an annual last year but



which here in Greece acts as a perennial: this is Lavender Lady (*L. hybrida* 'Lady') [now probably *L. × intermedia* 'Lady'], which grows to 30cm. I am also trying Spanish Lavender (*L. stoechas*) this year. Grown from seed last fall, I am wondering if it will flower this first season. It is reported to reach a height of 60cm and is the hardiest of all lavenders. Its floral display is quite different from the other lavenders with its conspicuous purple bracts topping each flower spike.

Propagation: Seeds, cuttings taken in spring or late summer.

Uses: Lavender wands (take 13 long freshly picked stems. Tie the blooms together with string or florists' wire. Hold the blossoms with the stems pointing up in the air, then bend them down one by one to form an umbrella. Secure stems at the other end of the bundle with ribbon and leave a loop for hanging). Also used in potpourris and dried arrangements.

Melissa officinalis

Lemon Balm is a loosely-branched herbaceous perennial that is native to the Mediterranean region. It is grown more for its lemon-scented leaves than for its appearance and reaches a height of one metre. It should be pruned after flowering to encourage new growth. It dies down in the winter. Self-seeds freely. *M. officinalis* 'Aurea' is variegated.

Propagation: Seeds or divide root.

Uses: Refreshing lemon tea.

Origanum

Oreganos are aromatic, herbaceous perennials which are native to south-east Europe. The genus *Origanum* includes herbs that are called both marjoram and/or oregano and includes species which exhibit variability in size, leaf shape and flower colour. The most popular for both ornamental and culinary purposes are: sweet marjoram (*O. majorana*) which grows to 50cm and wild marjoram or oregano (*O. vulgare*) which grows to 60cm. This includes both Greek (*O. vulgare* ssp. *vulgare*) and Italian oregano (*O. vulgare* ssp. *hirtum*) and these are considered to be hardy. The oreganos need alkaline soil and are susceptible to wilt in acid soils. They grow in both poor and rich soils but drainage should be excellent; they should be pruned hard in late summer after flowering.

Propagation: Due to variability from seed, they are best propagated by root division.

Uses: Culinary in tomato sauce and Italian and Greek cuisines.

Rosmarinus

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is a half-hardy evergreen shrub from the Mediterranean region with spiky highly fragrant leaves and mauve-blue flowers in early summer. It may grow to 2m in a sunny position but can be trimmed. Besides the upright form, I have the prostrate variety cascading down a stone raised bed. This variety forms a mat up to 30cm in height and spread.

Propagation: Cuttings, layering.

Uses: Culinary; used in a steam facial, potpourris.

Ruta graveolens

Also from the Mediterranean region is rue, a hardy evergreen subshrub. The stems are woody at the base and herbaceous further up. It reaches a height of 65cm with rounded lobed leaves which emit a strong pungent odour and it has yellow-green flowers throughout most of the year. It should be trimmed in late spring. Self-seeds readily. Caution – handling the plant may cause allergies and blisters on tender skins (it did on mine).

Propagation: Seeds or take cuttings.

Salvia

Sage is well represented in my garden. Common or garden Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is native to the Mediterranean. It is a grey-leaved, shrubby, strongly aromatic perennial with purple-blue flowers reaching a height of 60-90cm. In warmer climates it is evergreen and the faded flower stalks should be removed by the end of summer and the plant pruned again in the spring to the desired height. It is hardier when grown in a rocky alkaline soil, but grows wherever it is planted. There are several varieties including two golden sages: *S. officinalis* 'Aurea' with yellow leaves, and *S. officinalis* 'Icterina' with yellow margins and a wide green vein, both of which form a dense mound 30-40cm high and are amongst the hardiest of

the sages. There is also *S. officinalis* 'Purpurescens' with red-purple leaves, and *S. officinalis* 'Tricolor' or variegated sage with leaves splashed with purple, cream and green colour, both of which are less hardy and must be grown on poor chalky, dry soil in full sun if they are to overwinter. Greek sage (*S. fruticosa*) displays pale lilac flowers in late spring and throughout the summer. It is similar to garden sage but has exceptional sage flavour and fragrance. Pineapple sage (*S. elegans*) comes from Mexico. It has large dark green leaves and scarlet flowers. It must be pruned to form a bush 30-40cm, otherwise it will grow straight up to one metre.

Propagation: Seeds, cuttings or division.

Uses: Culinary uses are well known; dried wreaths.

Santolina

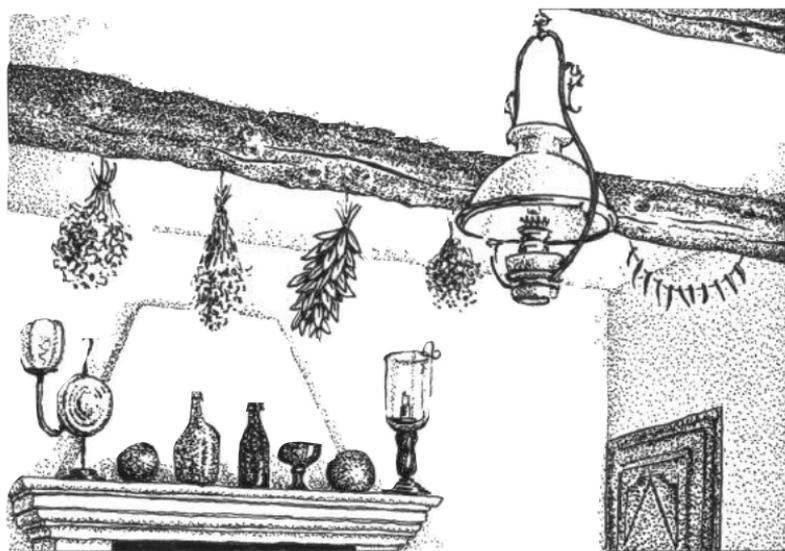
Cotton Lavender (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*) is a hardy evergreen shrubby herb from Southern Europe. It makes a good dense bush which grows to 80cm with a similar spread and has cypress-like grey-green foliage. There is also *S. neapolitana* which exhibits feathering foliage, grows to 40cm and is less firm in texture. Both have yellow button-like flowers which appear during June and July. Prune to keep neat in spring.

Propagation: Seeds, cuttings or root division.

Uses: In potpourris, small hedges in knot gardens or as a border, in herb wreaths and dried arrangements.

Thymus

There is a tremendous number of perennial thyme species and varieties, all hardy with small variously-scented leaves and tubular flowers from early summer. Bushy species are native to Southern Europe, while creeping species are widely distributed even in cold climates. Common thyme grows up to 35cm and should be pruned in the spring. It needs good drainage and a sunny location. Thyme enjoys sandy or rocky soil, a soil composed of half sand and half garden soil is ideal. An addition of limestone chips or oyster shell is beneficial in areas of highly acidic soils. Thyme is highly polymorphic, that is, showing considerable diversity in leaf size, shape, colour and hardness. It is advised that gardeners purchase thyme plants



from an outdoor nursery that is located in a climate similar to their own. Besides common thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) I have Golden Lemon Thyme (*T. × citriodorus* ‘Aureus’) growing which forms a shrub up to 30cm in height and spread, and creeping thyme (*T. serpyllum*) which grows in the crevices amongst the bricks.

Propagation: Cuttings, root division, layering.

Uses: Culinary.

Herbs that grow adjacent to the paved area include:

Laurus nobilis

Usually grown as a tree which can reach a height of 15 metres, but may be grown as a multi-branched shrub. The fragrant pine-green leaves are thick and tough. I have planted mine as a hedge behind the paved herb garden and plan to maintain it at a height of one metre. I have found that it is susceptible to scale insect. Propagation: Cuttings taken in late summer (may be slow to root).

Uses: Culinary; ornamental – easily pruned to a standard for garden, patio or pot culture; used in herb wreaths.

Mentha

Due to its invasiveness, I restrict spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) to a pot. It has a refreshing scent and is the most commonly grown mint. It reaches a height of 60cm. It is susceptible to rust and all infected plant material must be destroyed. A very different sort of mint is pineapple mint (*M. suaveolens* var. *variegata*) which has a light green leaf with creamy or white margins. It has a mat-like habit and does not exceed 45cm in height. I show mine off in a pot but because it is a slow grower it could be used as a groundcover. The third member of the mint family to be found in my garden is pennyroyal (*M. pulegium*) which is a creeping mint with small rounded leaves and a very strong peppermint scent. I have it growing in crevices amongst the bricks.

Propagation: Pieces of root, cuttings or layering.

Uses: Spearmint is used in cooking. Try it in meatballs as the Greeks do. Pineapple mint can be used as a garnish for drinks or fruit salads. All mints can be used in potpourris and pineapple mint is particularly attractive in the garden.

Tanacetum vulgare

Common tansy is a perennial herbaceous plant which dies down in the winter. It grows to one metre in height and forms an ever-widening mass of slim stalks and fern-like leaves. It has loose clusters of yellow flowers which dry well. This is an invasive herb and must have its growth controlled either by removal of its unwanted rhizomes (underground stems) or by planting it in a pot.

Propagation: Seeds, pieces of rhizome.

Uses: Culinary – chopped leaves added to salad; used in dried arrangements.

Plans for the future

The secret to enjoying herb gardening lies in its never-ending possibilities. Now that many of the herbs are gathered in a place of their own, I am trying to bring the stragglers home. These include:

Aloysia triphylla [now *Aloysia citriodora*]

Lemon verbena can grow to five metres. It is a deciduous woody shrub with a distinctive lemon fragrance and a native of Chile and Argentina from whence the Spanish explorers brought it back to the Old World. I want to plant it in the shrub border.

Propagation: Cuttings.

Uses: Culinary – as a tea or baked with fish or poultry; potpourris; ornamental – it can be trained as a standard.

Nepeta mussinii [now *N. racemosa* ssp. *racemosa*]

Dwarf catmint which had originally been a candidate for a square in the paved area would make a lovely groundcover under my shrub border adjacent to the herb garden. It forms a dense mat up to 30cm and has blue flowers in the summer.

Propagation: Seeds, cuttings.

Uses: Ornamental as groundcover.

Of course the herb garden will continue to evolve even after these changes are implemented. There is always the possibility that I might decide to plant up the stone bed exclusively with herbs or to back the bay hedge with a screen of honeysuckle and then place a stone bench nearby. The beauty of the herb garden is that it knows no limits and this, coupled with the adaptability of herbs to our mediterranean climate, makes herb gardening a sure winner.

Sources

Adams, James. *Landscaping with Herbs*. Timber Press, 1987. An excellent book providing a wealth of information on the herbs themselves and their uses in the garden.

Garland, Sarah. *The Herb Garden*. Penguin Books, 1988. Good general reference book with excellent photographs.

Kowalchik, Claire & Hylton, William H., eds. *Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Herbs*. Rodale Press, 1987. Good general reference book with emphasis on the uses of herbs.

SWAMP SIRENS – THE AMERICAN SOUTH’S BEST-KEPT SECRET

Tim Longville

The author would like to dedicate this article to the memory of Joseph K. Mertzweiller, who died on 26 June 1997.

It isn't often that a gardener gets the chance to explore and experiment with the spectacular riches of a group of plants almost entirely unknown in his or her own country or region yet which it appears possible to grow with considerable likelihood of success. Here is one of those rare opportunities.

It involves those beardless iris species and cultivars from the Deep South of the USA known as 'Louisiana Irises' (though in fact they occur in the wild as far west as East Texas and as far north as Arkansas and Missouri). For Mediterranean gardeners, these plants offer many attractions – and by comparison with attempts to cultivate them in, say, New England or most of the UK, many aspects of their cultivation should be relatively straightforward throughout much of the region. There is, I confess (with the salesman's untrustworthy honesty), one possible difficulty with their cultivation in the Mediterranean, but I think it's a difficulty most interested parties will be able to find ways round. (I'll deal with it and the ways round it in detail later on.)

So what do they have to offer and why should it be feasible for Mediterranean gardeners to grow them? In the first place, both Mediterranean winters with their relatively light frosts and Mediterranean summers with their quantities of real heat should be much to the taste of their Deep South constitutions. In the second place, they have the great virtue of flowering at the beginning of the season, from quite early in spring. In the third place, the Louisiana hybrids, in particular, often have flowers of astonishing size (10 or 12 cm/5 or 6" is not uncommon). Fourthly and perhaps most valuable of all, they come in a startling

repertoire of colours, patterns and shapes. There *are* subdued, laid back, coolly stylish Louisianas, in delicately decorated pale yellows and pure or just off whites, and the best of them are splendid plants. Nevertheless, most gardeners (certainly *this* gardener) will probably be most impressed by those examples whose main colour is one of the Louisianas' wide palette of deep copper and rich orange reds. In full bloom, these are eye-opening and jaw-dropping sights, quite unlike most people's idea of an iris. Dramatic, intense, tropical and (let's not beat about the bush) extremely sensual, not to say sexual – once seen they're unlikely ever to be forgotten. Vulgar? Certainly not. Operatic and extravagant, though: yes. These are plants for the full-blooded, not the faint-hearted.

While you're still catching your breath and consulting your personal psychologies to see where you fit in my scheme, perhaps I should deal now with that little local difficulty I mentioned earlier. Even more than the Japanese irises, these plants crave heat at their heads but *wet* under foot. In the wild, they're creatures of swamps or swamp-fringes. In cultivation, they don't demand a swamp or a bog but they certainly don't like to be dried out. (I'll come back to specific ways of dealing with this difficulty in a while.) Before you say, 'These plants are clearly impossible for the Mediterranean; why is this idiot telling us about them?' let me quickly point out that they are already being cultivated with conspicuous success in the more or less mediterranean regions of South Africa, California and Western Australia. Indeed, two of the outstanding contemporary hybridists of Louisianas are Mary Dunn from California and John Taylor from Australia. So clearly it *can*, given a little common sense and ingenuity, be done.

Perhaps the most remarkable of the many remarkable things about Louisiana irises is the fact that for us it's almost impossible at the moment to get any of them, either from nurseries in the UK or, to the best of my knowledge, from nurseries in the Mediterranean. (I'll come back to ways round *that* difficulty, too, in a while.) Of the species nowadays generally accepted to be involved in the race of Louisianas - *I. brevicaulis*, *fulva*, *giganticaerulea*, *hexagona* and *nelsonii* – only *I. fulva* is commercially available in the UK (It is *I. fulva* and,

even more, *I. nelsonii* which have provided the red blood in the veins of the Louisianas.) Of the literally thousands of hybrids which have been developed in the USA since WWII, not one seems to be listed in the 1996/7 edition of *The Plant Finder*. The only hybrid you can obtain appears to be the classic early (perhaps even the first deliberate) Louisiana cross, *I. × fulvala*, which the great iris expert and connoisseur, W.R. Dykes, made as long ago as 1910. *Why* aren't any of the others commercially available in Britain or Europe? The answer seems to lie in a combination of bad luck, bad cultivation – and sheer accident.

The Louisiana species began to be seriously collected in the wild in the 1920s and 1930s, just as their natural semi-swamp habitats were coming under threat from urban and industrial spread. (Nowadays there are very few wild sites left.) The native Southerner and iris devotee, Mary Swords DeBaillon, and Dr. John Kunkel Small of the New York Botanic Garden were perhaps the two most notable collectors. Dr. Small, in particular, a man of formidable energy and enthusiasm, scoured the south for Louisianas for several years. He always wore a special field-trip uniform of black alpaca coat, white shirt with stiff collar and black neck tie, khaki trousers and brown leather leggings (he must have got some funny looks on the bayous...) and travelled in a specially adapted Dodge pickup he called his 'Weed Wagon'. He gathered a huge range of natural colour-variations, many of which were recorded in beautiful watercolours by the English botanical artist Mary Eaton, who was then working for the New York Botanical Garden. What's more, he invented species names for almost every iris plant he ever collected; in all he claimed to have found and named no fewer than 75 new species. Only one, though – *I. giganticaerulea* – is still accepted today. His greatest legacy was perhaps his distribution of spare corms among his friends. These included the famous Southern gardeners and garden writers Elizabeth Lawrence and Caroline Dormon, and Mrs. Peckham of the American Iris Society.

It seems to have been through Mrs. Peckham that plants first reached the UK in any quantity. The great iris grower and remarkable garden writer Sir Arthur Hort describes in *Garden Variety* (1935) his not very successful attempts to grow plants

acquired from Mrs. Peckham. He commented despairingly that perhaps gardeners in relatively hot yet wet areas such as Cornwall or Ireland might have more luck. By the 1950s Leslie Cave in his monograph *The Iris* was muttering darkly about destructive problems with excessive winter wet and root rot among those few growers who were still experimenting with Louisianas in Britain. And that's more or less the extent of the generally available written record of British attempts. Yet the story, even in Britain, is not just one of failure. If it were, there'd be little point in telling it. In fact, Louisianas have been and still are being grown by a few individuals with marked success even in the less than ideal climate of most parts of Britain. There are even successful British hybridists. What perhaps happened with those earlier attempts, which put off all but a few devoted enthusiasts, was a combination of poor corms to begin with, followed by misjudgement in cultivation, both then crowned by bad luck with weather.



Records of attempts at cultivation in Europe are even *more* sparse. I know that they've been grown in France (though I don't know where) and (this should encourage even the most faint-hearted) that ten years ago they were being grown in what

was then East Germany. I'm not aware of any record of previous *failed* attempts to grow them around the Mediterranean and I very much suspect that they simply haven't been tried. Why not? I imagine because of the reverse of Mallory's Law: he climbed Everest because it was there; few if any people in the Mediterranean have grown Louisianas because few if any knew they were there. (I'll come in a moment to how, having discovered that they're there, you can acquire them.)

If I've tempted you to try them, how do you go about giving yourself the best chance of success? If you have a pool or a stream, plant them by or even in it. Lacking those desirable attributes, you need to give them the best rich, moist, acidic soil you can contrive. Several experts suggest that in dry areas you should try growing them in beds which are hollowed out to retain all available moisture. (Moisture, yes, but also heat and light, remember: don't bury them in shade.) If you have long, hot, rainless summers, should you despair of ever growing them? No. Many successful growers in the USA have precisely such summers. What tends to happen in those conditions is that after flowering the plants retreat into dormancy – but they don't die. Finally, whatever your conditions (but particularly, perhaps, if they're under stress from dry heat during summer or if your soil is by nature poorer and stonier than they'd ideally like), each autumn give them *plenty* of muck. They are, in that splendid old textbook phrase, gross feeders. In general, though, don't mollycoddle or fuss over them too much. By nature they are big, bold, robust plants, well able to look after themselves, given common sense in their initial soil and siting. Established plants in the ground will certainly survive a good deal of frost – and a good deal more than they're likely to encounter around the Mediterranean, except in the most exceptional of circumstances and winters. In East Germany in the mid-eighties they even survived, though they certainly didn't enjoy, temperatures as low as -23°C/-9°F. One problem-area as far as British or even Mediterranean cultivation is concerned, and one where they *may* quite often need a degree of protection, is the possibility of late frosts in March or April damaging, not the plants themselves, but the coming season's already formed

flower buds. A little strategically draped horticultural fleece, though, should provide sufficient cover.

“This may be all very well, and the plants may be lovely, but if they’re not available in Britain or Europe, what purpose does all this serve, except to make us furious and frustrated?” Don’t despair. The Society for Louisiana Iris in America will put you in touch with quantities of American nurserymen who offer plants. Many of them will also sell you seed. In addition, through its publications and through the generosity of individual members, the S.L.I. offers much expert information on the history and cultivation of its speciality. Finally, the British Iris Society will put you in touch with successful *British* growers of Louisianas – and they’re quite as generous as their American colleagues in pointing the beginner at sources for plants and in offering expert tips on cultivation.

It might be worth adding as an aside that certainly not all Louisianas are equally *cold* tolerant or intolerant and it may well be that not all are equally *drought* tolerant or intolerant. Because they have only quite recently begun to move out from their region of origin, little research has as yet been done on these matters. However, members of the S.L.I. were able to suggest to me several particularly cold-resistant hybrids, such as the classic ‘Dorothea K. Williamson’, created as long ago as 1918, likely to be well-adapted for UK conditions. Since many S.L.I. members, even in inland areas of Louisiana itself, have four-month-long extremely hot and virtually rainless summers, they may well have useful suggestions to make about specific candidates for specifically Mediterranean conditions.

You don’t, of course, imagine that once you’ve fallen in love with these swamp sirens..., once you’ve grown and flowered them successfully..., that’s it: you’ve finished? Oh no. Indeed, that’s only the beginning of the real obsession. The real obsession is creating your own hybrids. But that’s another story...

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my friend, Mrs. James E. Garrett Jnr of Pegram, Tennessee, who shared in the fun of the hunt and suggested many leads to follow. Thanks, above all, to Joseph K.

Mertzweiller of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, an infinitely generous one-man university of Louisiana Iris Lore.

Contacts

THE SOCIETY FOR LOUISIANA IRIS:

Foreign subscriptions \$10.00 a year.

Subscriptions and enquiries to: P.O. Box 40175 U.S.L. Station, Lafayette, Louisiana 70504.

THE BRITISH IRIS SOCIETY:

Enquiries to: Mrs. Eileen Wise, 197 The Parkway, Iver Heath, Iver, Bucks SL0 0RQ.

Further reading

CAILLET, Marie and MERTZWEILLER, Joseph K.: *The Louisiana Iris*, 1988, Texas Gardener Press, PO Box 9005, Waco, Texas 76714. (Comprehensive manual, still available, covering all aspects in expert detail, including growing Louisianas in Mediterranean-related areas such as Australia and California.)

CAILLET, Marie and MERTZWEILLER Joseph K. (Editors): *1995 Special Publication of the Society for Louisiana Irises*. (Briefly covers history, culture and hybridizing.)

DORMON, Caroline: *Natives Preferred*, Claitor's Book Store, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1965. (Still available in its first and only edition, this deals briefly but succinctly with Louisianas and contains much valuable information on many other plants from the Southern U.S.A.)

HORT, Sir Arthur: *Garden Variety*, Arnold, 1935. (Honest, expert and perceptive, about irises and much else. Quite frequently available at relatively low prices from U.K. secondhand bookdealers.)

LAWRENCE, Elizabeth: *A Southern Garden*, University of North Carolina Press, 1942. (The latest – and extremely handsome – reprint of this classic of American garden writing was in 1991.)

MERTZWEILLER, Joseph K.: *Society for Louisiana Irises Fiftieth Anniversary Publication*. (Deals with Dr. Small's trips, reprints his articles and some lively reminiscences by one of his assistants, and reproduces Miss Eaton's original watercolours.)

THE MINT BUSH AND ALLIES

Tom Wellsted

Please do not be put off by what you may have read about this plant. Excellent, rather neglected, the Mint Bush (UK) or Mint Shrub (US) is one of those plants mentioned in most books on shrubs and in garden encyclopaedias and often with rather discouraging words about its habits. One can only wonder why. It is, as mint is, a labiate plant, it hails from N. China and has been given the name of *Elsholtzia stauntonii* by botanists, a name that they have managed to keep for years. However, it is usually described as a sub-shrub due – it is said – to its soft woody stems which may die back to ground level in winter. It does no such thing here and indeed plants such as *Weigela* which are considered to be shrubs by most people die back much more than my Mint Bushes. Every year. It is also said to be a straggly, weedy plant but these are most unkind words for it is certainly not so here. Neither does it require humus-rich soil in full sun, for it certainly does not get those here either. At least it does not get full sun all day but quite a lot when available and I think that this plant will be found to be well worth trying in many Mediterranean areas.

With me it makes a fine compact shrub with strong, light brown, woody stems which branch, and from which rich green leaves start to appear in late spring. Rather spear-head shaped, the leaves give off a strong mint scent when crushed but they are a trifle rough eating. From late summer into autumn the plants become smothered with up to about 22cm-long spikes of pinkish lilac flowers and these in turn attract a smothering of insects, maybe because of the late flowering – a great asset. After many years, perhaps seven to eight, my plants have grown to some 90cm tall and as much wide, and I doubt that they will reach the 1.2-1.5m or so given in most references. They are extremely healthy, dense plants growing in a poor soil composed largely of sand with lumps of clay and the whole matted together by pine roots. Young plants may take a year or two to settle and until then need some watering in hot, dry weather but afterwards tend to flop only when conditions are

severe enough for all else, including me, to flop too. To me, another asset is their ability to self-sow readily. Unwanted plants are easy to pull up and others, treated with a little more care, can make welcome gifts. Seed is widely available but I have never come across this plant in anyone else's garden.



Elsholtzia stauntonii

From the pretty inedible to the very edible: apple mint. A Mediterranean plant, it should and does do well here but it is surprising that it is not more widely grown, at least in this part of France where the far coarser spearmint, usually labelled as *Mentha viridis*, the synonym for *M. spicata*, also from the Mediterranean and elsewhere, is commonly available. Indeed it is sold, fresh picked in bunches, in food shops as well as in plant markets; rarely have I seen apple mint, *M. suaveolens*. Curiously the variegated leaf form of apple mint is known as pineapple mint and it is also reputed to have a different leaf scent – it stays reputed with me. This pineapple mint is not so good a garden mint here as the creamy white splashes of variegation tend to burn out easily but if it is all you can get, go for it because more likely than not it will revert, at least in part, and then you will have apple mint, or if your nose dictates otherwise, you may have green pineapple mint. Odd is it not? In fact all my stock now is reverted pineapple and jolly good too. The soft, woolly, fresh green and sweetly-scented (sickly I've read in one strange

description) leaves densely cover the plants which, with me, grow some 45-50cm tall. As with most other mints, apple mint may spread rather rapidly but unlike the other culinary mints which I have grown here, it has survived through the worst of winters, rotten springs, hot summers – all the climate can throw at it – and grows in none too good a soil. In culinary use it is to us superior to all other mints, excellent as a fresh mint, excellent preserved as a mint sauce. Used, fresh or from the sauce jar, mixed with yoghurt or cucumber or both it makes a delicious cooling relish which goes splendidly with hot and spicy dishes. Mint sauce made with apple mint, sugar and wine vinegar, uncooked, has no equal. White wine vinegar is best from the cosmetic point of view but red wine vinegar is the only readily available form here and does very well for taste. Use as much mint as possible, thin mint sauce gives this sauce a bad name, throw in sugar to taste and vinegar to make it just liquid enough. Blend in an electric blender. Bottle in suitably sealable and as sterile as possible jars. This year, 1997, we are just finishing the last of our 1989. Other mints which have disappeared from this garden have been plagued by various pests and diseases but the only pest we have noticed is the attention of the mint moth. These tiny day-flying moths are flying jewels of garnet and gold and we let them be so. Bon appetit.

Bon appetit reminds me of a book which might be of interest. Let me say at once that a long time ago I did play a very small part in its production. The book is *Herbs, Spices and Flavourings* by Tom Stobart, published by the International Wine and Food Publishing Company in 1970. The book still has no equal in breadth and scope and humour: I doubt that it will. A fine tribute to the late author who lived for many years on the island of Mallorca. He told me that it was originally conceived after his experiences on the Himalayan mountain called Everest. A member of the successful team which first conquered this peak in 1953, when he enjoyed fearsome brews such as tinned sardines stirred up in tea, his experiences led him to wonder how things might be improved in a tasty way. The book tells all – about herbs, spices and flavourings.

LEMONS, LEMONS... AND... MORE LEMONS

Helene Pizzi

In a Mediterranean garden, what could be more cheerful, fragrant, undemanding and beautiful than a lemon tree? In his recent book, *Gardens of the Sun*, it is obvious that Trevor Nottle would not agree with me. His only mention of lemons is that of their containers: "...beautiful terracotta lemon tree pots...". It is a surprise that he has not talked about this perfect tree for a 'garden of the sun'; one can't but wonder if he meant to write 'lemon' when he wrote 'carob' describing it as a small tree.

It was thought that these trees were introduced into Europe about 1,000 years ago. Only relatively recently, in 1951, new excavations at Pompeii uncovered a perfectly painted wall depicting various types of citrus fruits. Two of the trees were lemon trees, fruit and all, which were identified by Professor Domenico Casella as the variety Femminello that we know today.

In the 1700s lemons and limes were given to sailors on their long voyages to prevent scurvy, but already seven centuries earlier the Republic of Amalfi's ships carried lemons for the sailors – they had guessed that lemons helped to keep their sailors healthy. This small attractive tree seems to have been given an overdose of good things by Mother Nature... Even today we resort to fresh lemons as a remedy for flu and colds.

One of the pure pleasures of having a lemon tree in your garden is the intoxicating fragrance of the blossoms... another is the smell of a freshly picked lemon. Pick a ripe lemon, scratch the yellow skin to release the essences, smell, and you will see what I mean. When walking around the late Stelvio Coggiatti's garden with him a few years ago, we stopped by a small lemon tree. Stelvio (who was Italy's internationally known plantsman and rosarian) plucked a ripe lemon from the tree and held it to my nose. There was no odour. For some mysterious reason his tree produced scentless and almost

tasteless lemons. The tree was healthy and he said he left it as a curiosity.

There is a very interesting Renaissance garden near Florence, Villa Medici at Castello. The garden was designed in 1538 by Tribolo, and it was once known for its 500 potted lemon trees. Under the expert direction of Architect Giorgio Galletti, this Medici garden has recently been restored and is open to the public. Potted lemons are set out in the formal beds as they were at the end of the 1500s, and these cheery small trees, heavy with fruit, make good company for the hundreds of old roses that have been replanted as they once had been; it was only a theory that all Italian Renaissance gardens were only green. The potted lemons are placed every winter in the original *limonaia*, which dates from 1785, to protect them from the cold Tuscan winters.

The potted lemons of so many of the old Renaissance gardens, including the garden of Val Sanzibio in Veneto, were not only grown for their beautiful addition to the garden decoration but actually were raised as a cash crop. Lemons from these villas were exported all over Europe, even as far as St. Petersburg, and the earnings, in some cases, were enough to pay for the entire upkeep of the garden.

Lemons will happily grow outside in most areas referred to as 'Mediterranean', provided the temperatures don't fall below freezing. In Italy they grow outdoors along the shores of Lago di Garda, in a sheltered microclimate with snow-covered Alps protecting them from the cold north winds. The protected peninsula of Sorrento is famous for its wonderful lemons; however, the major lemon crops grow further south, in Calabria and Sicily. Anyone living in a climate with temperatures that are mild shouldn't miss the joy of having a lemon tree in the garden.

Having come from a climate that experiences icy temperatures of -25°C every winter, and never having seen a lemon tree before arriving in Rome, it was the first thing on my list to plant when we began our garden. Our pet tree was loaded with lemons when, in 1985, Rome had a freak week of below freezing temperatures. The frozen lemons were unusable and the 25 year old tree died... a part of my heart too.

In our residential area of Casal Palocco many lemon trees growing on the south sides of houses survived that cold winter. With no really protected exposure, we decided our only hope was to have lemon trees in pots. As Trevor Nottle mentioned, there are many lovely terracotta pots available, suitable for lemon trees, but the price of a good sized one that I had my eye on was shocking. Having read Vincenzo Forte's book *Il Limone*, published by Edizione Agricole della Calderini s.r.l., I decided to grow my own from seed and cuttings.

Nine years later, we have had the excitement of watching the seeds sprout, the cuttings root, the first naughty thorny branches grow, and finally, after the infantile period, the first blooms and fruits. They are all different, surprises, and some surprisingly good. The pots can be moved to protected places in winter and so far the little lemon trees are doing well.

With your own tree producing fruit you can know that your lemons are free from poisons and absolutely safe for eating, rind and all. Lemons make all the difference in so many wonderful Mediterranean foods, and it is my pleasure to share a couple of favourite recipes with you.

LIMONCELLO

First of all, this delicious lemon after-dinner liqueur has been sipped on the island of Ischia for a long time, but only in the last decade has *limoncello* suddenly become a fashionable 'must' all over Italy. The fragrant liqueur should be kept in the freezer, like vodka, and served in tiny chilled glasses. For several years I tried to get the locals to share their *fatto in casa* recipe, but no one would give out their family secrets. Finally Rosalba Andriotti, who yearly makes a trip to Sorrento just to get huge unsprayed lemons for her liqueur, kindly agreed to share her 'secret' recipe... which is surprisingly so very simple to make.

Peel just the yellow rind of one kilo of lemons (the white pith is bitter). Place the rinds in a glass bowl together with one litre of pure 95% proof alcohol. Cover and set in a dark cupboard for 10 days. Boil 750g sugar with 750g water to make a syrup and cool completely. Pour syrup into the alcohol and rinds. Stir well, then strain through a sieve and pour into

pretty bottles (the bottles are important; choose interesting ones). Serve iced.

ELENA'S PASTA ALL' LIMONE

This very quick pasta dish is as delicious as it is easy to prepare. Put a large pot of water on the stove, and while you wait for the water to boil, prepare the sauce.

In a large serving bowl place the juice of one lemon, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, two tablespoons vegetable oil, two tablespoons butter and 50g (about a teacupful) of freshly grated Parmesan cheese. When the water comes to a boil, salt to taste and cook 500g (1lb) spaghetti (or short macaroni, or shell-shaped pasta), tucking the pasta under the water with a wooden fork and then giving it a good stir to separate the strands while cooking. Just before the pasta is cooked, add two spoons of the pasta water to the sauce. When the spaghetti is *al dente*, quickly drain in a colander, pour into the serving bowl and toss well. Serve hot, with extra Parmesan and black pepper, with a bottle of chilled white wine.



Drawing by Yvonne Linardos

'QUATS IN POTS

Duncan Ackery

Terracotta containers filled with lemon trees are a common sight on Tuscan terraces in summer. The trees are trained to a handsome shape, giving a contrast of foliage and fruit colour to the garden. Lemons are one of the hardier citrus but even they can be damaged by a hard or prolonged frost and usually need to be moved under shelter to avoid the worst of the winter cold. Other citrus may also be grown in pots and I have found that the most successful of these are the kumquat family. These are small trees which can be pruned into neat and attractive shapes. The kumquat has an orange fruit which is good to eat and is about 3-4 cm long, The skin is soft and relatively sweet and the flesh acid. The abundant fruit remains on the tree throughout the year.

Kumquats are the hardiest of all citrus and require minimum winter protection. This characteristic has been bred into the limequat, which is a hybrid of the kumquat and the subtropical 'Mexican' lime. It has bright yellow fruit, slightly larger than the kumquat, with a pleasant acid lime flavour. It is one of the best citrus for drinks and salads. I grow these in my garden as the fruit is seldom seen in markets or shops.

Trees of the kumquat family flower in April/May and rapidly set numerous fruit amongst those of the previous year, so some are always available. The trees are neither bulky nor heavy and so can be easily moved, either out of the direct force of cold winter winds and/or into a shady position during the heat of summer. I find a pot of approximately 40 cm in diameter and 30 cm in height gives sufficient space for root growth. I use a mixture of commercial compost and sand with a layer of gravel on the surface to prevent excessive evaporation. A good soaking once or twice a week is adequate, with feeding every few weeks. A constant problem with pots in my garden is colonization by ants. A simple remedy is to fill a terracotta dish with water and place the citrus pot in this on a second smaller dish which is inverted, thus keeping the bottom of the pot above the surface of the water. The ants are defeated by the moat.

I recommend these small attractive trees to those with either large or small Mediterranean gardens or even a small patio. The diced fruit are excellent in salads and sliced limequats taste and look superb in summer drinks.





BOOKS

GUIDE TO 156 GARDENS OF CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN FRANCE by J. Kater Pollock

available by mail from Flowerpoll Ltd., 40 Mill Lane, Linton, Cambridge CB1 6JY, price £6.95, p&p included (Companion volume: *Guide to Gardens of Northern France*, same price).

This pocket-size booklet (10.5 × 14.5 cm) has been very well thought out and is invaluable for those interested in visiting public and private gardens in France, below the Loire valley approximately. The book is divided into four sections with maps showing the page numbers of the garden descriptions in the book. Information given includes the address and phone number, the name of the owner, when it is open, any admission charge or whether it is necessary to make an appointment, and how to find it. Details of parking, toilets, wheelchair access and refreshment facilities are given and, in the case of an historical site, the opening times of the buildings to which the garden belongs.

There is a code for garden features to be found and a star-rating for the garden as a guide to the relative level of interest, compared to others of its kind. The main section gives a brief history of the site and a description of the most important plants and features which are found there. There is an index of gardens, as well as a list according to the *département* in which they are located.

The area along the Mediterranean coast is well represented and includes all the famous gardens which we find in books

about Mediterranean gardening, as well as many others well worth visiting. Part of the fun of going to other gardens is that one can get ideas for using plants in different ways, as well as seeing which ones grow best in certain circumstances, and there is always a chance that there will be something new to discover. The only omission from the book that I have found is that it does not say whether there are any plants available for sale either at the garden itself, or in a nursery nearby. But, apart from this, it is an excellent and comprehensive book and I am sure that it will become a well-used companion during my travels in France.

Jenny Bussey

LETTERS

Derek Toms, in his letter to the Editor printed on p.56 of No. 9, would appear to invite comments on the Journal from members, and “what they like or dislike about it.” I am little qualified to remark on the Society, but the rapid expansion in its membership and the growth of interest in Mediterranean gardening in general certainly do make it worth considering, in general terms, what the future of the Society should be.

Firstly and at this moment, the Mediterranean Garden Society IS the Journal.

Secondly, this Journal has been such a success that it would be a grave error to change any facet of it too readily. What seems to me to be its charm and interest is that its content does not depend on glossy coloured pictures nor its finances on advertisements. Each number is a small work of art, and the authors and members are intelligent connoisseurs. The articles are interesting and helpful. Experience is amassed for the benefit of all. But it is vital, as Derek Toms says, that a certain number of these intelligent connoisseurs share their experiences and thoughts with the other members by writing articles or else, as Virginia Scaretti points out, there will not be a society at all. “Should it fail us, please count me out.” “It” in this case must mean the members - for their contributions make the Journal. “What should we do? Change our lives?” she continues. Perhaps the answer is “Yes!” if she agrees, as surely she must, that to be able to read such articles as that by Nicholas Stavroulakis in this summer issue makes everyone’s efforts worthwhile. Besides I for one would be very interested indeed to hear about the conclusions she has drawn from her trials and errors and the purely nominal presence of her nurseries.

Thirdly, our Editor must be near a nervous breakdown to be mastering (mistrusting) her own job while at the same time producing a Journal of 58 pages free of cost to us for her valuable time. Is there any way in which we can lighten her load?

Fourthly, we should be represented on the Internet, which is not – as some people still seem to believe – an arena for noisy

games and porn play, but an attempt to place all human knowledge at the recall of anyone with a modem. For months now there has been a well-patronised mailing list on the Net at “medit_plants@mallorn.com” minded by Christopher Lindsey at Mallorn Computing in the States with 300 or so members and contributed to by several of our members such as Seán O’Hara and Peter Worsley. This carries most interesting discussions between the members on most subjects under the sun that have something to do with mediterranean plants and gives instantaneous propagation of knowledge on the subject. But as well as a mailing list we might consider a page for the Society giving the names of officials, details of subscription, recommended nurseries, books and seed offers, which would have subsidiary pages for such matters as gardens open to the public in the Mediterranean and details of unusual plants on offer at different nurseries. I cannot see any way that the MGS could make any money out of the venture so it should not jeopardise its tax-free status.

Fifthly, we should obviously encourage as much as we can such tremendous and useful works as Duncan Ackery and Hamish Warren’s *Directory of Mediterranean Nurseries*. Though I have not yet seen it, it sounds to be a project beyond praise. Another project that the Society might embark on is a list of those seed merchants whose list contains a good proportion of mediterranean plants. This would be similar in many ways to Duncan’s and Hamish’s masterwork on the nurseries and everyone would join in.

Finally, may I say in the expectation that I speak for all that the Journal is a Koh-I-Noor where any too sharp tap may quickly reduce its value. Let’s continue as we are, so long as Secretary and Editor can stand it!

*Hugo Latymer,
Mallorca, Spain*

I think Virginia Scaretti’s guilt stems from the fact that she *can* write, not from any *Meditorial* Jewish-Christian implications! I distinctly recall a letter, very early in *TMG*’s history. But I absolutely agree that with a scattered membership, our journal

is the link. It is only fair for editors to ask for input from members who can write or illustrate. Surely we all have tight schedules. My own monumental guilt over not contributing earlier comes from being a working writer.

Derek Toms asks for views about future directions:

First, I'd like to think that one day I might be able to meet some of you and see your gardens – and I hope very much that if you're coming to Australia you will contact me. I felt that the mention of the availability of a list of members in Issue No. 8 lacked impact. Could a mention be included in every issue?

Secondly, I've particularly enjoyed the articles about gardens open to the public. Most gardeners love visiting gardens and nothing compares to a personal account of even the most written-about spot. Information and/or advice about visiting times are also appreciated. A propos of which, how about a list of members' gardens which are open regularly?

Lastly, please Russell Read, another story?

*Fiona Ogilvie,
Bathurst, NSW, Australia*

Ceylan Orhun, writing from Istanbul, raises a number of old problems (TMG No. 9). I can tell she is speaking from frustration and the heart. Can I attempt to reply?

Firstly, Latin. I know, when I started gardening it was gobbledy-gook to me too. But I'm mainly interested in wild plants. Without the Latin name, accepted the world over, you cannot be sure that the person you're communicating with is talking about the same plant. For instance, here in the UK the common name "bluebell" is used in England for a bulb – *Scilla non-scripta* [now *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*] – and in Scotland for a little herbaceous bell-flower, *Campanula rotundifolia*. Names of plants are almost always local as you say, and often very interesting, but try gardening in a different country – I garden in England and Greece – it's pretty confusing, I can tell you!

I entirely agree about the use of local remedies for plant diseases. I paint scale insects on my pot plants with a paintbrush dipped in methylated spirits, and I slosh soapy washing up water over shrubs infested with aphids.

Centipedes are great eaters of insect pests and should be encouraged, though here in southern Greece the centipedes grow very large (*sarandapodarousa* – the forty-footed one) and they bite us! But I don't think the cigarette butts are a very good idea. A solution made by soaking them in water would contain nicotine, which is indeed an effective insecticide. Nicotine insecticides were much used in commercial greenhouses in the UK, but were banned in the 1960s, because they seriously damaged the health of people working with them.

And on to composts. I make my own. Here in Greece only dusty plastic sacks of peat, with hardly any fertilizer, can be bought. But John Innes compost is really a formula. It was devised by the John Innes Institute of Horticulture in the UK in the 1940s. It can be bought ready-made in the UK, but you can make your own. Here is the classic recipe they gave:

John Innes No. 1 potting compost

- 7 parts loam (preferably sterilized)
- 3 parts peat (sieved)
- 2 parts sand (washed if it's from the seashore)
- 3/4 oz ground limestone (per bushel)
- 4 oz John Innes fertilizer (per bushel).

Yes, I know, I know, if you live in the country a lot of the above is difficult – and I can hear you saying, what is a bushel? Actually it's the amount which will fit into a box 22 inches × 10 inches × 10 inches. Here is an easier recipe based on the JI formula which I use both in Greece and in the UK.

7 one-gallon buckets of best soil available – it's impossible to sterilize it.

3 one-gallon buckets of peat or leaf mould or compost, or any really organic material you can obtain, as long as it doesn't have any nasty trace elements or pests in it.

2 one-gallon buckets sand

3/4 oz ground limestone. (However, if your soil is chalky or limey you can leave this out. Also leave it out if you want a compost for plants which need acid soil.)

4 oz good general fertilizer. Potting base like JI, or Chempack available in the UK, is ideal, but not essential. I grind up dried goat dung in Greece to supplement the fertilizer!
Mix very well, and make sure it's fine and crumbly.
Happy gardening!

*Margaret Lynch,
Meldreth, Royston, UK*

A propos of Tom Wellsted's article 'Talking Tomato' in *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 9, I'd like to let readers know that besides the Baumaux company in France, which has a huge glossy catalogue and rather high prices, there are two small suppliers of rare vegetable varieties who have many different sorts of tomato. Both grow their own from seed and sell both seeds and fruit on local markets, and the seed by correspondence. I don't think there is any difficulty obtaining seeds from them but they are both small family businesses and no doubt have all the problems of weather and management that "artisanal" production implies. They are both very knowledgeable plantsmen.

Harvey, François et Simone. Combe Basse, 30460 Lasalle. Sells produce on Friday mornings at the market of Saint Jean du Gard. François has photographed 150 varieties of tomato all grown by himself.

"Le Potage d'un Curieux", Jean-Luc Danneyrolles. Rare vegetables available on the Saturday morning market in Apt, rue de la Sous-Préfecture. To obtain his small but rich catalogue, write to him at "La Molière", Saignon, 84400 Apt.

*Louisa Jones,
Rousselonge, Payzac, France*

Tom Wellsted himself adds: I have just heard from a reader in the UK of a seed firm that surpasses all those mentioned in my article on tomatoes. It is Simpson's Seeds, 27 Meadowbrook, Old Oxted, Surrey RH8 9LT, UK They also send plantlets of many varieties to most places (except Australia, New Zealand and California but including, as they say, Alaska and the Falklands).

PLEASE RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION IN JANUARY

As from January 1998, we propose that new and existing subscriptions to the MGS become due in January.

We hope that this will make it very much easier for you to remember to renew your subscription – if you so wish – and will mean considerable savings to the Society in terms of man hours and postage for reminders.

Members who fail to renew their subscription in January will receive copies up to the anniversary of the date they joined the Society (as shown on the address label) and one reminder will be sent with the final copy.

New members joining during the course of the year will automatically receive all volumes of the journal from the beginning of that year.

If you have any questions about this arrangement, please contact the Secretary at Box 14, Peania 190 02 Greece, or phone or fax Barbara Diamantides at (+30 1) 8080 291.

CONTRIBUTORS

DUNCAN ACKERY is a retired physician now gardening in Menorca.

JUDITH BARCLAY is an environmental consultant who lives and gardens with her husband and one-year-old daughter on the south-west Atlantic coast of Spain. She is particularly interested in the recovery and regeneration of natural habitats on or around waste grounds, building sites etc through the use of local flora.

SUE GOUMAS started gardening under fluorescent lights in New York. Since settling in Greece 15 years ago, she has been growing things in the soil. Her main interest these days is in raising perennials which can withstand the long, hot summers.

TIM LONGVILLE has a small walled garden in the un-Mediterranean climate of Solway Firth. He writes regularly for *The Hardy Plant*, *Hortus*, *Plant Heritage* and *The American Cottage Gardener*, among other journals.

RICHARD MORPHY left a career as an engineer in the UK to join a long-established family business in Greece. Latterly an attempt to establish a garden from scratch on a barren hillside has been a challenge and is an absorbing interest in retirement.

HELENE PIZZI is an artist and garden writer long resident in Italy. She is an International Rose Judge as well as an expert cook.

NICHOLAS STAVROULAKIS is a historian, writer, artist and cook who now lives and gardens in Crete. From 1977 to 1993 he was Director of the Jewish Museum in Athens. His publications include *The Jews of Greece*, *Jews and Dervishes*, *A Cookbook of the Jews of Greece* and *Salonika: A Family Cookbook*.

TOM WELLSTED has been involved with garden publishing for many years, as a journal contributor, book editor and author; his books include *Vegetable and Herb Growing* (1977) and *Patio & Window Box Gardening* (1986). He now lives and gardens in Provence.

FLAVIO ZANON is an Italian architect who has been living and working in Crete for the past three years. While studying at the University of Venice he had the chance to work in the Department of Landscape Design and has had an abiding interest in plants and gardens since then.

