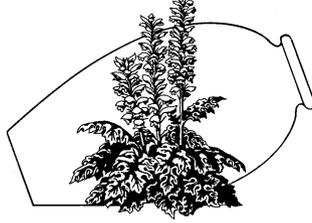


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Phlomis fruticosa

THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN



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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.

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Summer
Flowering
Trees



Brachycton acerifolius



Parkinsonia aculeata



Albizia julibrissin



Lagerstroemia indica

(M)EDITORIAL

There is a theory that the megalithic monument of Stonehenge was designed by a visiting Mycenaean architect. Whether the temple precincts were originally landscaped and planted must remain even more a conjecture than the identity of its designer. But it is a fairly safe guess that a Mycenaean would be more familiar with gardening than his British clients. In those days (c. 1500 B.C.) the Mediterranean was a cultural centre far in advance of the barbaric north.

Perhaps (for the lack of evidence forces us again to speculate) our Argive architect knew of courtyards where pomegranate and sea lily grew in earthenware containers, where the grape ripened against sun-baked walls. Courtyard gardens (the near-perfect solution to growing plants under Mediterranean conditions) certainly have a venerable pedigree. Around them the Minoans built their palaces, the Romans their villas, the Arabs their *madaris* and the monks their cloisters. They have survived from antiquity to present-day ubiquity, from the Greek *avλή* in the east to the Spanish *patio* in the west.

The Mediterranean tradition of gardening is said to have begun in Egypt some 3-4000 years ago, spreading from there to ancient Greece. In the Athens of Alexander the Great Theophrastus created what we would call a botanic garden (the world's oldest existing botanic garden, incidentally, is at Padua). The 1st century A.D. herbal of Dioscorides contained a plant list to rival many of today's textbooks. The Romans learnt much of their gardening from the Greeks, and among the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii are to be found the remains of gardens not so different from our own. Also recognisable to the modern horticulturalist are tools and techniques described in tracts from medieval sources ranging from Byzantium to Moorish Andalusia. Continuing this breathless skim through the centuries, we come to the great gardens of Italy, from the more formal Renaissance examples to the later Baroque style, which have had such a profound influence on garden design throughout the world.

By the nineteenth century little was left of the former glories of the Mediterranean shores other than ruins to fire the romantic imaginations of the upper middle classes making the Grand Tour. Some of these subsequently returned south to build extravagantly landscaped villas on the French Riviera alongside the humble *potagers* of the villagers. (Even while the great gardens fell into decay, ordinary folk – largely ignored by historians – continued to tend their plots as they had always done.) In gardening as in much else it was the North which was ascendant: The Horticultural Society was now graced with the prenominal ‘Royal’, and Kew Gardens became a national institution. As the increasing wealth of countries like Britain enabled more and more people to enjoy a modicum of luxury, the grander swards were augmented by thousands of suburban lawns. The twentieth-century phenomenon of gardening as our leading leisure pursuit, culminating in (or degenerating into, depending on your point of view) the Garden Centre and the TV Gardening Guru, thus emerged.

The Mediterranean gardener of today, sitting down to fill in another order form for plants from Britain or Holland in the absence of a local supplier, can be forgiven for feeling that we are the newcomers who have yet to catch up with the horticultural mainstream of temperate Europe. But this is a false perspective engendered by trends which are historically recent. (In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the trade in plants was in the opposite direction.) Our priority in the immediate future is undoubtedly the development of horticulture in this region – but as we seek to go forward, is it not possible that we can also learn from our long and rich Mediterranean past?

THE VILLA THURET, CAP D'ANTIBES

Joanna Millar

Nestling unseen and almost as much unknown on the *coin milliardaire* of the Cap d'Antibes is the remarkable botanical garden of the Villa Thuret.

This year the garden celebrates the 50th anniversary of its incorporation into the I.N.R.A., l'Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique. The Director, the young and dynamic Madame Catherine Ducatillon, is passionate about her research projects and will relate in charming detail the history of each plant, its provenance and the experiments which are being carried out at this very serious and advanced research station. Like those at Fréjus and Sophia Antipolis (where they are growing proteas with a view to commercialising them for the private buyer), it is one of 22 such centres throughout France and employs 220 people and 80 research workers and engineers.

The history of the garden dates back to 1855 when Gustave Thuret purchased the land on which the garden stands today and built himself a house and a small laboratory. He laid out a garden and an arboretum which his friend George Sand was to describe as 'the most beautiful I have ever seen'.

Monsieur Thuret had begun his working life as a diplomat and was sent as an attaché to Istanbul, but he found that his interest in botany and algae was much greater than his diplomatic prowess and thus turned his attention to the study of plants and seaweeds. In this he was aided by the botanist E. Bornet, with whom he collaborated in work on the classification and reproduction of algae.

In the first years he had great difficulty in obtaining seeds and plants, as transport between continents was still slow and uncertain; moreover, his property lacked water, which had to be brought in by donkey cart from the town of Antibes. However, he continued to improve and expand his garden until his death in 1875, upon which his sister-in-law gave the property to the State with an endowment for its upkeep on condition that it would continue as a research station.

Thuret's work was carried on by the botanist Charles Naudin who became the first Director of the garden under its new State ownership; throughout Gustave Thuret's life he and Naudin had maintained close ties, never ceasing to correspond with one another on diverse botanical subjects. Monsieur Naudin worked on Mendel's theory and made a collection of more than 60 species of *Eucalyptus*, many of which can still be seen today. His successor, Monsieur Poirault, continued experiments on plants which could withstand hot, dry climates similar to those experienced during Mediterranean summers.

In 1927 the garden was attached to the Institut de Recherche Agronomique – finally to become l'Institut National de Recherche Agronomique (I.N.R.A.) in 1946 – as a laboratory for botanic and plant pathology studies.

There are more than 3000 plants in this garden of 3.5 hectares, many of which are protected species under the Convention of Washington, and about 200 new ones are planted each year. Visitors may be surprised to see areas of bare soil, but this is part of the renovation plan. Each year a small area of the garden is ploughed up and turned over to await the arrival of new, untested plants. There is a real feeling of movement, new species being tried out, unacceptable species being discarded, and research into better and healthier vegetation constantly continuing.

Trees are not pruned and after the third year young plants are no longer watered so that they can acclimatise to the droughts of this region. Those which do not survive are not re-introduced.

The four main research activities at the moment are:

1. Control of flower crop disease.
2. *In vitro* culture, which not only helps health maintenance and finds cures for disease but also speeds up the multiplication of interesting plant types.
3. Building up plant resistance to disease through studying the protein content of plants with a view to creating new resistant genes in plants.
4. Finally, a particular study of cypress and other conifers to make them resistant for agriculture (windbreaks) and the reconstruction of fire-damaged forests.

There is a very interesting plantation of conifers and cypresses at the eastern end of the garden which claims to be the most complete collection in the world, and an alley of rare palms and cycads. The latter, together with the ginkgo trees, are all that is left to us of the vegetation of a prehistoric era.

The laboratory flourishes today, exchanges seeds with botanical gardens throughout the world and is doing research into good varieties of plants to replace those which repeated fires and pollution have destroyed on the Mediterranean coast of France and adjacent countries. Chemicals and fertilisers are kept to a minimum in order that plants can be raised in the most natural conditions. If they fail it is assumed that they could never be acclimatised in this area.

When visiting this property it must be borne in mind that this is a research establishment rather than a pleasure garden, where species and varieties take precedence over design and aesthetics. Nevertheless, any keen plantsman will find it of enormous interest, particularly among some of the later plantations at the bottom of the garden where one of the most complete collections of Australasian plants can be found.

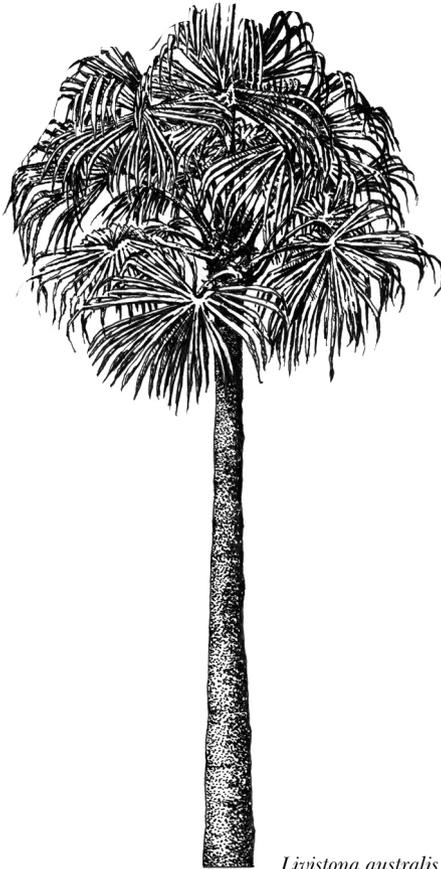
Some of the trees and plants which can be seen are as follows:

- *Taxodium mucronatum* [now *T. huegelii*], Montezuma cypress
- *Parasyringa sempervirens* [now *Ligustrum sempervirens*] which looks like privet and comes from China
- *Lindera praecox* which likes a warm, lime-free site
- *Ceratonia siliqua*, the carob, which is used for animal food and whose seeds were used as carat weights by gold- and silversmiths
- *Livistona australis* which was sent to Monsieur Thuret by the Jardin des Plantes in Paris
- *Jubaea spectabilis* [now *J. chilensis*], the Chilean palm
- *Brahea dulcis*, from Mexico
- *Quillaja saponaria*, the soap bark tree from Chile, which creates a lather with its inner skin
- Callistemons, melaleucas, acacias
- *Scilla peruviana* in its white form
- *Buddleja auricula*

- *Eupatorium ianthinum* [now *Bartlettina sordida*], a member of the Compositae [now Asteraceae] family from Mexico
- *Dolichos lignosus* [now *Dipogon lignosus*] a rare climbing pea.

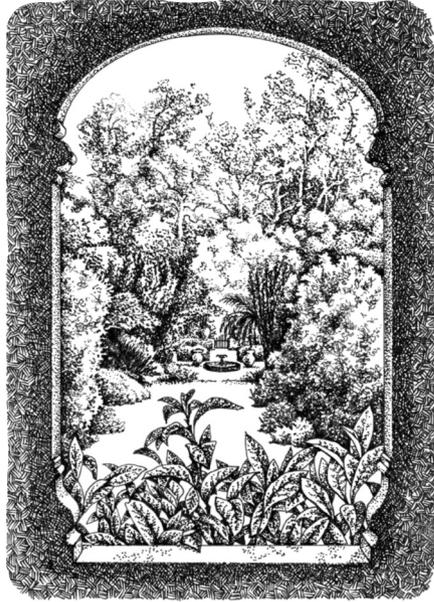
There are also many other plants from Ethiopia, the Himalayas, Tasmania, New Zealand, Argentina and South Africa.

The garden is open all the year round and entrance is free.



Livistona australis

**A RARE
AND PRECIOUS
JEWEL: THE
GARDENS OF
THE CASA DEL
HERRERO,
MONTICETO,
CALIFORNIA**



Martin Wood

As a Gardens Consultant, I am privileged to see many different gardens, from the rolling acres around the grandest aristocratic seat to those around the smallest and humblest of country cottages. Some make you despair, but very occasionally one has to be reminded that envy is a deadly sin! The Casa del Herrero does, I am ashamed to say, bring out the sin of envy and perhaps if the proverbial genie were to grant me three wishes I would, without hesitation, squander one wish to possess this rare and precious jewel.

Fortunately the house has remained, until quite recently, in the ownership of the same family, something comparatively rare in California, and it also remains intact, having never been subdivided. The house was built in 1925 for George Steedman who had made a fortune from the manufacture of saws in St. Louis, Missouri, and often referred to himself as merely an 'ironmonger', continuing the self-deprecating joke

in the estate's name, which means 'house of the blacksmith'. In reality Steedman, who maintained a small workshop on the estate, was a very skilful engineer and metal worker who could turn his hand to most things. He also travelled extensively in Europe, particularly in Spain, where he was accompanied by Arthur and Mildred Byne, the authors of *Spanish Gardens and Patios* (published in 1928) who were great authorities on Spanish gardens. This trip around Spain with the Bynes undoubtedly inspired the 'Casa', but Steedman was a meticulous man, or rather the 'Casa' was his life's dream and he was determined to take his time and to get everything just right, a fastidiousness that resulted in the house remaining in the planning for more than four years.

The land on which the house was to be built was an 'old Spanish land grant, half way between the mountains and the sea' extending to around eleven acres. Although Steedman had some knowledge of architecture, he prudently decided that he needed an architect. He turned to George Washington Smith, the most prominent architect in the area, who had a thorough understanding of the Spanish colonial style, and was on reflection perhaps the only possible choice. Steedman must have been an exacting client, for not only did he take a minute interest in every aspect of the design but he also returned from Spain with all manner of objects, from window grilles and panelled doors to a fifteenth century painted ceiling acquired from a monastery. It is hardly surprising that Smith is said to have done more than 40 studies of various aspects of the project.

When it came to the garden, Steedman chose his landscape architect with the same care, settling on the remarkably talented Ralph Stevens, who also designed some of the gardens at Lotusland (see *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 4). The Casa del Herrero is undoubtedly one of his finest works, but it is not a typically Moorish garden; rather its design, as David Streatfield pointed out in *California Gardens: Creating a New Eden*, is inspired more by the Italian Renaissance villas and the English landscape tradition. This comparison is apt for the design would seem to have a greater affinity to the Villa Gamberaia than to the Alhambra Palace. Naturally the gardens



The south front

have evolved as the years have passed and there have been some alterations, most notably to the forecourt, but in essence Stevens' design, and the vistas he planned, remain much as he intended.

Originally the house was approached by a curling drive into an informal forecourt, but in 1929 Lockwood de Forest, a local landscape architect, was engaged to alter this arrangement to give a formal square forecourt, paved with pebbles in a design similar to that used in the Patio de la Reja in the Alhambra. At the centre of the court is a small raised pool that acts as a focus for the courtyard, but unlike the Patio de la Reja it is not surrounded by cypresses. The corners of the forecourt are planted in a lush tropical manner with bananas and miniature date palms (*Phoenix roebelenii*) while, against the house walls, a *Distictis laxiflora* [now *Amphilophium laxiflorum*] runs up to and over the eaves of the house.

The main pleasure gardens lie to the east and south of the house, and the tour begins, on leaving the drawing room, with the Spanish patio. The patio echoes the drawing room and is enclosed by arches made from concrete but covered by

creeping fig (*Ficus repens*), which softens the architecture and makes one believe that the arches are formed from clipped hedging. The patio is really a green garden, the three small formal beds flanking the small pool and the fountain (what would have been the fourth is used as the sitting area) all being covered by green ivy. To add some height two beds have pieces of topiary and the third has a very large palm that provides some shade. Again, the attention to detail is quite extraordinary. The paving is all of Spanish terracotta tiles but the furniture, although derived from a Spanish design, was all made by Steedman in the workshop from aluminium, rather than from the wood and leather of the original. When in time the house passed to the Steedmans' daughter, Medora Bass, a tile bench became a favourite place to sit in the late afternoon, commanding, as it does, a distant view of the ocean through the arches. As she remarked, 'I have reached an age now when all I collect are sunsets' and there can be few pleasanter places to take tea and do precisely that. Set against the view is a gothic sundial and birdhouse bearing the motto 'Use well thy time, fast fly the hours, good works live on' which, being in the gothic taste, may sound totally out of sympathy with the character of the garden, yet is strangely entirely appropriate.

The patio leads on to the east garden, which clearly owes a great deal to the English garden tradition. A broad rectangular lawn is terminated at one end by a large 'exedra' with colourful tiled benches beneath some large pittosporums, and at the other by a short screen made up of what appear to be columns from a Venetian palazzo but are smothered by a banksia rose. The lawn is flanked by a pair of herbaceous borders planted as blue and white borders. Large groups of agapanthus provide the main framework and to these are added calla lilies, Japanese anemones, huge billowing French lavenders and such things as heliotrope and statice. Medora Bass always tried to keep a low edging of such things as pansies, petunias and lobelia and also liked to keep a high proportion of white flowers so the garden could be enjoyed, as it had been in her parents' day, as a twilight garden.

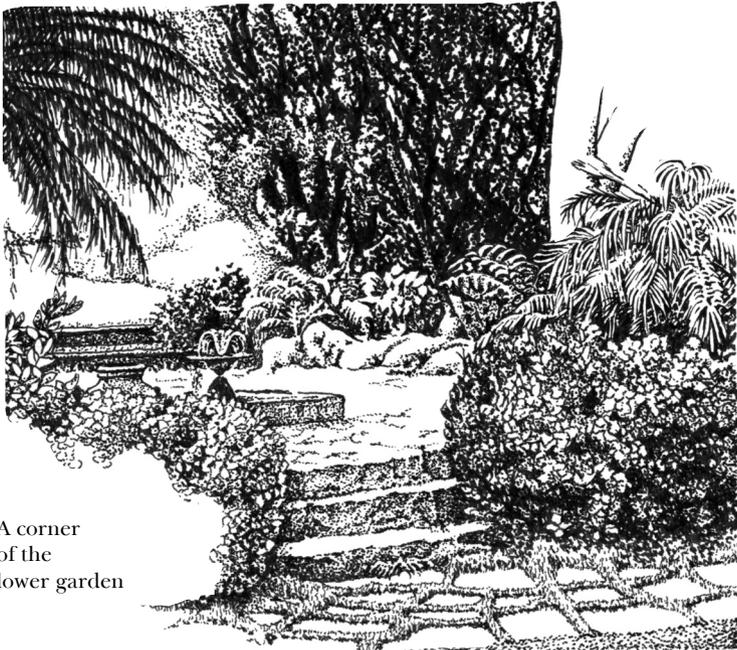
Both borders are broken, half-way along their length, by the path from the Spanish patio, a vista terminated beyond the

second border by another large 'exedra' backed by a decorative tile panel. White oleanders provide some shade and a white jasmine gives a rich scent and creates a pleasant place to sit. To the side, some curving steps lead down to the rose garden. Unusually it is shaped like a large fan, with the beds all planted with standard roses that George Steedman felt gave the garden a 'medieval' look, and I suppose it does look like a Renaissance painting. In Mrs. Steedman's day the beds were edged by a dwarf box hedge to emphasise the shape, but this was removed as a labour-saving measure in the late 1970s. With hindsight, from an aesthetic point of view, this was probably a mistake, for the beds, with their standard roses, seem to lack definition, although this might be corrected if the roses were merely grown as bushes, but then one would need to bend down to enjoy the scent and it would lose some of its character. Mrs. Steedman loved not only roses but also camellias, which she grew in beds at the back of the Spanish patio, between the east garden and the forecourt, and which seem almost hidden away. After the garden was finished George Steedman took up silversmithing, creating some beautiful sculptured vases to display his wife's camellias which were inscribed 'To hold God's gifts for your delight'.

Personally I think the garden comes into its own on the south front of the house. The ground slopes gently away from the house and this natural slope has been put to good use. A covered loggia was an integral part of the house design and it forms a pleasant summer sitting room, complete with a set of aluminium furniture made in the workshop. A large 'cup of gold' (*Solandra guttata*) festoons the loggia and graceful sweeping steps, flanked by beds filled with *Strelitzia reginae*, lead to a square lawn, dominated by a large tiled star pool that acts as an elegant beginning and full stop to the southern garden. The water from the star pool flows into a short rill and small square pool set in crazy paving and some broad steps that are also flanked by two benches, covered by a large *Campsis radicans* and making pleasant places to halt a while.

Like many people, as I get older I find my taste grows ever simpler and perhaps more classical, and it is precisely for this reason that I find the southern garden so appealing and so

beautiful. The vista is defined and formed by tall hedges of eugenia (*Syzygium paniculatum*) at the back of deep borders filled with green ivy. Between the borders is a long expanse of grass lawn, which is given some shape and further interest by the addition of scallops of star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*), effectively softening the lines and preventing the lawn from resembling a bowling green. A few shallow steps, flanked by two *Raphiolepis indica*, open on to the fern garden with a raised star shaped pool and cast-iron fountain at its centre. Set behind dwarf retaining walls, some California oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) frame the view back to the house, but tall Australian tree ferns also cast a delicate shade, the sunlight revealing the almost gothic tracery of the structure of the fronds. More steps lead down to a small walled garden arranged around a small square lawn, the grass replaced in recent years by Korean moss as a labour and water saving measure, but the rest of the garden remains just as it always



A corner
of the
lower garden

has been: a mass of camellias, fuchsias and tree ferns. From the tile benches one can admire, beyond a small gate, a cactus garden filled with masses of aloes, agaves and tall old man's cactus (*Cephalocereus senilis*), with Dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*) forming a backdrop. The vista continues beyond the cactus garden, through a grove of eucalyptus that were unfortunately damaged in the poor weather a few years ago, to be terminated by a wall decorated with colourful Spanish tiles. In former days, when there was still time to enjoy such simple pleasures, this was a favourite place to enjoy a family picnic lunch.

Walking back from the lower part of the garden, Medora Bass usually guided visitors along the west side of the garden, beyond the formal hedges, through the citrus grove with the paths lined by clumps of agapanthus. Although the soil is a heavy clay the citrus flourish, perhaps because of George Steedman's charity. During the Depression the unemployed would call seeking work. The 'Casa' already had eight gardeners, so Steedman had the men dig drainage trenches and install land drains to drain the entire orchard, an act of pure generosity for which the reward was fine crops of citrus fruit.

George Steedman died in 1940, but Carrie Steedman lived to enjoy the house he had built for her for another twenty-three years. After her death in 1963 their daughter Medora Bass inherited the house, but unfortunately her husband's business interests kept them in Philadelphia, which meant that the house was used as a holiday home or let to tenants. George Bass decided to retire in 1983 and the Casa became their permanent home, enabling them to enjoy George Steedman's creation in all its many facets, but tragically George Bass died in 1985 after just two years of retirement. Medora Bass lived on in the house her father had built for just two more summers. At her death in 1987 she left the Casa del Herrero to a trust for its continued maintenance, so that it might be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

Perhaps the beauty of the Casa del Herrero lies in the superb proportions. Sir Edwin Lutyens, the great English architect, once wrote that a garden scheme 'should have a

backbone - a central idea beautifully phrased. Thus the house wall should spring out of a briar bush - with always the best effect, and every wall, path, stone and flower bed has its similar problem and a relative value to the central idea'. In the case of the 'Casa', it is precisely because 'a beautifully phrased idea' was adopted and such exacting attention was paid to the various proportions of lawn, bed and path that the garden is such a wonderful lesson in the art of garden making. I only wish it could be mine; but, as they say, envy is a sin.

The Casa del Herrero is now open to the public by appointment only, which may be arranged by telephoning (805) 565 5653.

MORE ABOUT SALVIAS



Salvia verbenaca

Tom Wellsted

What a family the genus *Salvia* gives us. Annuals, biennials, herbaceous and woody perennials in a diversity of flower colours and shades, in a diversity of sizes and often so easy to grow. But not always. I would love to know how to raise the Blue Sage, *Salvia clevelandii*, to a fighting fitness; I would love to be able to raise *S. microphylla* from cuttings (its very different variety, *S. microphylla* var. *neurepia* is more accommodating in this respect but a less attractive plant); and why has *S. aurea* [now *S. africana-lutea*] never flowered for me? In fact I just do not have a decent yellow-flowered salvia at all; Jupiter's distaff, *S. glutinosa*, though an easy plant, is really rather dull. There is a mass of blue-flowered perennials, 'blue' being rather loosely used for colours ranging from lavender to deep violet. Some of these have rather attractively spotted throats in white to creamy yellow shades. They include the lovely native of this area of Provence which seems to flower all summer and autumn, if not earlier and later too, decorating our roadsides with its lavender spikes, *S. verbenaca*, as well as *S. tesquicola*, lavender too and perhaps 60-70 cm, and *S. forsskaolei*, more violet but with a creamy flecked throat and taller – perhaps to 90 cm; even deeper and more startling in flower is *S. guaranitica* [now *S. coerulea*], to 1.2 m or more. These lavender-violets all

have rather rough, tough-looking leaves – curious. A true blue is the Blue Sage, *S. azurea*, whose only fault (for me) is its rather wand-like, unbranched stems to about 1.5 m; the leaves are a bit willow-like too. The other Blue Sage, *S. clevelandii*, has intensely aromatic, rounder leaves, indeed among the most fragrant, but it is a very, very difficult plant to keep growing well. If you do actually succeed in raising it from seed, it seems to need only so much moisture, yet only so much drainage, or else it will rot and even good hot weather conditions will not necessarily pull it out of a sulk – another cause of aggro. I have had a plant for about four years, about 25 cm tall now just as it has been for the last three years. It does not do anything except sport its three or so leaves, really infuriating. However, I do take consolation in the fact that a nurseryman of the Lubéron with whom I have shared hundreds of seeds has failed to raise any *S. clevelandii* at all. Does anyone know of a good source, please?

Salvia patens is a rather short-lived herbaceous perennial with lightish green leaves and large, brilliant blue flowers. It is rather weak-kneed, however, and becomes an untidy creature. The U.S. name of Gentian Sage is justified and qualifies it, if space is available, as a plant of interest.

Of the bedding varieties, annual sages – well, they are now so brilliant and of such excellence generally that I leave it to the seedsmen to extol their virtues. Developments take place in this department all the time. Why not with the herbaceous and woody perennials too, I wonder? Before leaving the non-perennials, *S. argentea* must be mentioned. Reputedly a biennial, it may in fact grow for a couple of years before flowering in its third. Then what majestic spires of rose-tinted silver flowers appear above the superb, thick silver-haired leaves! It too is reputedly a native here, but I have yet to see it in the wild.

Perhaps the red-flowered perennial salvias offer the most astounding displays. Some are very easy plants, some a bit less so. *S. blepharophylla* may be distinctly invasive and thus terrifies me as I have suffered from several such ground hoppers; it does have fine crimson flowers, but I do not grow it. The upright *S. coccinea* and *S. fulgens* have their merits as fairly easy

plants but do not excite me greatly. Then there are *S. microphylla* and its dissimilar variety *S. microphylla* var. *neurepia*. Of these, maddeningly, I have not yet managed to raise cuttings of *S. microphylla* though it is reputedly easy to do so. It grows into fine bushes covered with almost fruit gum coloured scarlet-crimson flowers sparkling among the dark green, smallish leaves. Superb plants may be seen growing in the Jardin des Vestiges, Marseille. Here I have the variety *neurepia*, grown from RHS seed. This is an entirely different plant, straggly in comparison and with lighter, grass-green leaves and seemingly fewer flowers. *S. microphylla* has leaves with a minty currant aroma, while the variety *neurolepia* is much more curranty. To me, however, the greatest red-flowered glory is *S. elegans*, the Pineapple Sage. Here is a true floral firework. A well-grown specimen in full flower seems to be like an exploding spray of scarlet streamers shooting in all directions. And not only does it flower for a long time, it also has delightfully pineapple-scented leaves of a light green. The plant is incredibly easy to strike cuttings from; indeed, if a stem is trimmed or broken off, it seems sufficient just to stick it in the ground and in a few days it may be rooted. Having been told that this was a tender plant, I at first used to grow it in 30-litre pots brought under outside shelter, open, for the winter. This pot size quickly proved inadequate and so with some doubts I planted out. Nothing has held my plants back, the largest so far being about 2 m in diameter and some 1.2-1.5 m in height. In a spot with very poor soil the height has been held at about 60 cm, but the plant is still spreading. They do need watering in dry weather and will reward one for a little feeding. Flower spikes may be 30 cm long. I am not yet sure but think that cutting them down annually, while it may delay flowering, does improve the quantity and quality. Do try this plant, perhaps against a house wall in wet areas.

HOW TO GROW AND LOVE YOUR CANNAS



Marjorie Holmes

Most gardeners have their special horticultural pets and dislikes – the latter usually arousing the more fervent emotions – and, through no fault of its own, the blameless canna is more often than not cast into this unpopular slot. Visions of massed displays in municipal gardens leap to mind – crude fiery colours, overcrowded, torn and tatty leaves. It doesn't have to be so. I love my cannas which come in both rich and delicious shades and give an unfailingly fresh display for five months on end until cold weather finishes them off.

Cannas' basic needs are simple: an open position, rich soil and plenty of water. They are invariably described as Gross Feeders, but I don't give them any preferential treatment. They love a heavy moisture retentive soil with plenty of humus which only needs a good soaking every few days. As they originate in the humid tropics, the occasional spray from a passing hosepipe to dampen the leaves is appreciated. A thick mulch around the roots helps too. I use buckets of olive leaves or plenty of scrunched up bracken. As soon as new shoots appear or when planting new clumps, a few handfuls of manure and/or rich compost dug in around will set them on their way, and once the leaves have formed a sprinkling of sulphate of ammonia or any nitrogen fertiliser will support the exceptional growth and prevent chlorosis – the scourge of limestone soil. I usually repeat the ammonia once more mid-season or if the leaves look anaemic.

All dead blooms should be removed together with the basal seed pod, and when there are no further flowering shoots the whole stem must be cut down to ground level no matter how

many healthy leaves remain. Don't be faint-hearted! This is the single most important part of canna maintenance. Only by this regular pruning will the plants continue to throw up strong new shoots with ever more luscious heads. Nothing is wasted as the leaves and stalks are a wonderfully rich addition to the compost heap; if you feel lazy just chop them up and pack them round the base of the plants, they soon decompose.

The first blooms of the season are often quite small and spindly and are better removed straight away to strengthen the developing plant, again cutting down the whole stem to base.

Cannas grow easily from seeds, which need soaking in warm water for 24 hours before planting. Quicker by far, though, is division of the fleshy rootstock which, like that of iris, develops in profusion and needs splitting up regularly. After discarding all dried sections, replant in small clumps about 18 inches apart. You can do this at any time. They are so good-natured, though, I prefer to replant at the end of the season when I know where they will be and they have a head start once the spring flowers are over. One may lose a few of course if there is an especially cold spell, so it's an insurance to store a few in boxes or pots filled with leaf mould or potting soil which is not left to dry out completely.

There are several species. The *RHS Dictionary of Gardening* describes no less than 18 varieties, with heights from 3 to 15 feet (1 to 4 or 5 metres). The usual garden strain is derived from *Canna indica* and *C. flaccida* of which there are some beautiful hybrids, on average between 3 to 6 feet tall (1-2 metres).

Cannas have so many good points. They are completely disease- and insect-proof – apart from the occasional leaf cutting bee; they never need staking whatever their height; they can be moved at any time with scarcely a hiccup – even in full flower – and their handsome leaves come in all shades from deep reddish brown to pale lime green. As foliage plants alone they are worth their space in the garden and in light shade will grow particularly strongly – though at the cost of flowers. As an added attraction the leaf axils are often home to the pretty little bright green tree frogs which peer out like a Beatrix Potter illustration.

ROSEMARY

Helene Pizzi

‘Rosemary is for remembrance’... Some consider it a symbol of love... In the language of flowers, ‘La tua presenza mi rianima’ (your presence renews my soul)... ‘Balsamo consolatore’ (consoling balsam)... This beautiful plant seems to be connected with a soothing spirit.

For thousands of years, almost every Mediterranean garden has had at least one rosemary bush tucked away somewhere, often near the kitchen door within the cook’s handy reach. It was one of the first plants that we put in our Casal Palocco garden 34 years ago and this neglected bush faithfully flavoured our foods and revived our spirits for over three decades; only when the woody old rosemary bush died did I realise how much of a friend I had lost. We have many others (sharing space with bearded irises, favourite roses such as ‘Bloomfield Abundance’, ‘Blairi 2’, ‘Félicité et Perpétue’, with *Agave*, *Ajuga* and violets, etc.), all special friends, all unique, but none quite like our first.

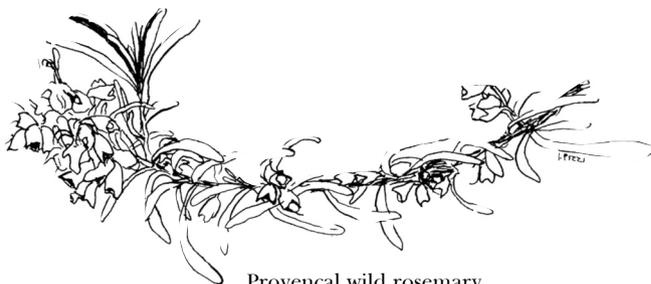
Whenever I walk about the garden, whatever the season, I rub my fingers on the stiff needle-like leaves, releasing the balsamic fragrance. The smell of rosemary has a calming effect – within a second or two it captures one’s soul and uplifts one’s mind with its perfume. One spectacular silver-grey bush is a good six feet tall – when, that is, its branches are not weighed down and bent by the thousands of little enveloped seeds, even though still in flower. The bumblebees are particularly eager for its nectar, adding to the weight on the branches. This rosemary was grown from a cutting of a wild plant found in Provence, is excellent for cooking, and is very different from any other rosemary.

Italy’s renowned plantsman, Stelvio Coggiati, gave me a plant that he thinks may be a species rosemary. It has made three flowers this year for the first time – although it has been in our garden for five years – and it has a very pungent Vicks-like smell that would ruin any dish. However, a few sprigs of it

Corralitos rosemary

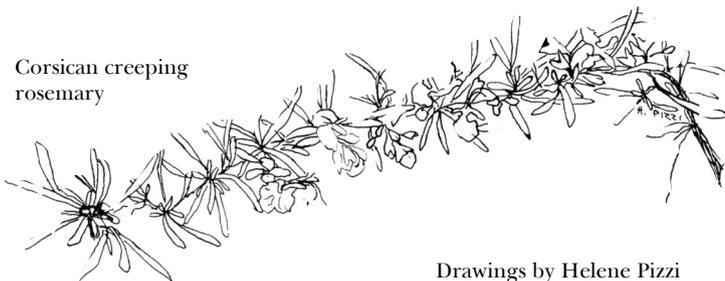


Stelvio Coggiati's
(?)species rosemary



Provençal wild rosemary

Corsican creeping
rosemary



Drawings by Helene Pizzi

in boiling water make the air balsamic and give relief to stuffy noses. We have a pink-flowered Corsican rosemary and another from Santa Cruz with white flowers. One which produces pale lilac blooms was brought from Scotland, where it braved a difficult climate, out in the open, against a fence. Our sturdy Tuscan rosemarys have a rival in one from Corralitos, California, that has deep green thick needle leaves growing nearly horizontally away from the stem and is wonderful for flavouring fowl. Each of these rosemarys has its own unique magical combination of pungent essences.

The Romans brought rosemary, together with its name, as they conquered and expanded their empire: 'ros' (dew) and 'marinus' (of the sea). Evelyn wrote that your memory will be improved by smelling and eating rosemary. Charlemagne decreed that it should be grown in all imperial gardens; a legend tells that in the 14th century Queen Elizabeth of Hungary used it for an anti-wrinkle lotion and claimed that the recipe had been given to her by an angel. A rosemary tisane will help the digestion and is good for the liver. Besides giving food a delicious flavour, the addition of rosemary is said to cure depression and sharpen your mind. Who could ask for more?

Rosemary plays a vital part in the Mediterranean cuisine. The following recipes are easy to prepare favourites which are also gourmet treats.

Pollo alla monumento

Cut a whole chicken into small pieces. In a large frying pan place enough extra virgin olive oil to cover the bottom. Set on a high heat and add the chicken together with 3 crushed cloves of garlic, 4 or 5 10cm sprigs of fresh rosemary (dried will do at a pinch: use 2 tablespoons), salt and toss with two wooden spoons until the chicken pieces are nicely browned. Add 250g of top quality dry white wine; when the wine has boiled for 2 minutes, lower heat, partially cover the pan and cook for 15 minutes. Add hot water if necessary. A few minutes before the chicken is done, generously grind black pepper to taste. Serve piping hot with mashed potatoes (flavoured with nutmeg and lemon) and chilled white wine.

Rosemary focaccia

Press white bread dough (use your favourite recipe or prepare it by softening 20g brewers' yeast in 250g tepid water together with 1 teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon sugar. Add 2 tablespoons corn oil, melted lard or butter. Gradually work in 500g flour, or more if needed. Knead well on a floured surface, cover with a cloth and leave to rise until doubled in size. Knead well again and proceed as above) into baking sheets that have sides and that are well oiled with extra virgin olive oil. The dough should be about 1 cm high. Poke with fork and cover with cloth and leave to rise until doubled. Generously sprinkle the whole surface with olive oil, scatter lots of fresh rosemary leaves (that have been stripped from the woody stem) over the top of the focaccia, then sprinkle the whole surface with salt. Bake in medium hot oven, circa 190° C, until the focaccia is golden. Cut into small pieces and serve as bread. This makes a wonderful light meal served with assorted cheeses, olives and your favourite wine.

Buon Appetito!

CASTAWAY'S CHOICE

Hugo Latymer

If you found yourself cast away on a Mediterranean island and were only allowed ten plants with which to make a garden, what might you choose? Perhaps the following might be my selection...

Trees:

Bauhinia variegata 'Candida' (White Orchid Tree)

Better than the species here. More evergreen (less tatty in winter). Not so vigorous. Beautiful white flowers at the end of April. Easy from seed. Fast growing.

Eucalyptus gomphocephalus Tuart.

Far the best Eucalypt for most of the Mediterranean as it likes alkaline soil. Dark foliage: far denser than *E. camaldulensis*, the second best! Excellent timber.

Harpephyllum caffrum (Kaffir Plum)

Very tough evergreen tree sometimes found when young as an indoor plant. Attractive foliage, totally stoical to all forms of torture. A good dense screen. Red semi-edible cherry-sized fruits in March-April.

Koelreuteria bipinnata (Red-fruited Golden Shower Tree)

My favourite tree for the Mediterranean. Small, deciduous with large panicles of small yellow flowers in late summer and papery fruits of attractive shades of rosy red in autumn. Most plants will grow under it, so excellent for small gardens. Variable from seed. Fast and easy.

Metrosideros tomentosa [now *M. excelsa*] (New Zealand Christmas Tree)

The best evergreen seaside tree. Spectacular deep scarlet flowers in mid summer. Will grow readily from seed but does not flower when young.

Callistemon viminalis (Weeping Bottlebrush)

The most tree-like of the Bottlebrushes and good in the Mediterranean. Grows fast to 6 m then more slowly.

Narrow weeping habit. Deep red flowers in April and some year-round.

Shrubs

Euryops pectinatus (*E. chrysanthemoides*)

For many years I have grown in the nursery a plant under this name with rather silvery leaves that is much used in Southern California. One with dark green leaves was usually called 'Emerald' in Californian nurseries. Both have now become common in the market in Spain and I am told the plant is correctly called *E. chrysanthemoides*.

Whatever it is called, it is one of the best yellow-daisied winter-flowering (mainly) evergreen shrubs. Best if replaced after 8-10 years. To 2 m.

Ligustrum japonicum 'Texanum' (Texan Wax-Leaf Privet)

An excellent evergreen hedge, less pest-ridden than *Euonymus japonicus* and tidy with its shining green leaves that take shearing. White flowers in April.

Limoniastrum monopetalum

Another indestructible plant, a sprawling bush to 1.20 m, evergreen with dull greyish green leaves and lavender-coloured flowers. A good ground cover in difficult places and seaside.

Palms

Syagrus romanzoffiana (Queen Palm)

Appreciated more in California than in Spain. A fast growing feathery palm with long arching fronds. Eventually a clean ringed bole. A change from Phoenix palms.

Hugo Latymer notes that several members of the MGS have written to him for seed of *Acacia stenophylla* (see *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 4) from places as far apart as California, England and Greece.

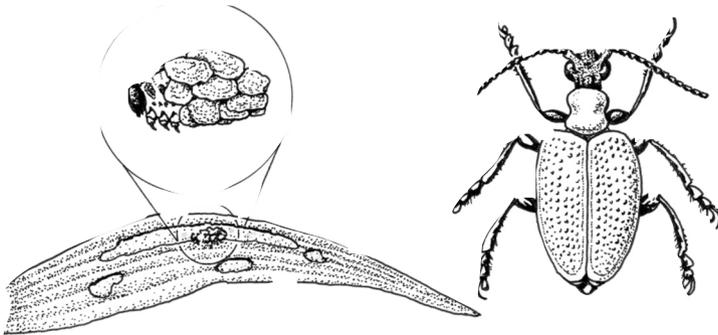
THE LILY BEETLE

Richard Dight

Many lilies, grown in pots and in the ground, get eaten by the larvae of the lily beetle (*Lilioceris lili*). This pest is frequent in the Mediterranean and Asia and attacks most species of lily as well as some other liliaceous species including *Convallaria*, *Fritillaria* and *Polygonatum*. It is becoming more frequent in England and I have seen it on outdoor lilies in Holland.

The adult beetle's body is bright cardinal red, while the head, antennae and legs are black. Beetles can be found on lilies from the spring onwards, having emerged from hibernation. Eggs are laid on the leaves, and larvae hatch and feed on the leaves, buds and flowers. The plant becomes very tattered, the flowers opening deformed; in severe infestations plants can be almost totally destroyed. The larvae can be seen feeding on the leaves, and at first sight look like dark brown or black slugs. The larva is in fact a pinkish orange with black spots, but is entirely covered with black slime that protects it from being eaten by birds.

If only a few lilies are grown adult beetles and larva can be collected and destroyed. Where this is impractical an insecticide should be used. Nicotine is effective and is a natural



Damaged foliage with larva

Adult beetle x 5

(after J. Botke & C.M. van Slikke)

plant product, but take care and follow the directions on the label.

Editor's note: On the subject of pests, many readers have asked for more information about the Geranium Bronze Butterfly mentioned by Jenny Bussey in *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 4. A native of South Africa, this small butterfly, *Cacyreus marshalli*, spread first to the Balearic Islands in the early 1990s and then to mainland Spain. It has bronze-coloured wings with a white dotted margin, two blue spots on the lower pair which also have a very characteristic little tail. It lays its eggs, which are round, white and flat, on the petals and bracts of geraniums, and very occasionally on the leaves. The caterpillars are a whitish colour at first, turning green after the second moult. They are all hairy, as are the chrysalids which form on the plant. Any type of geranium which is a hybrid of the genus *Pelargonium* may be attacked, though the 'grandiflora' varieties appear to be more resistant. It seems that the pest has also adapted to live on some indigenous species of *Geranium* in Spain. In South Africa this butterfly has natural enemies which keep it under control. Where, as in Spain, there is no parasite or predator which attacks this pest, its caterpillars may be controlled by regular use every 15 to 20 days of one of the following products: *Bacillus thuringiensis*, flufenoxuron, dimilin, or synthetic pyrethroides.



Grace Kiernan

Enemies lurk in the shadows of even the most carefully tended garden. They skulk under the stones, overwinter in fallen leaves and hide deep in the earth. Without prior warning they invade unsuspecting plants; flowers wither, leaves blacken and stems rot.

Like the Pimpernel they are everywhere. Listed in gardening books under the heading 'Pests and Diseases' they are myriad.

The Mediterranean garden is open to attack from any one of them, but surely none more lethal than the red ant. As a destructive pest it must rank higher than slugs, snails and aphids.

In this part of Europe the native ant was black, and garden-friendly. He lived out of doors, eating dead wood, fallen leaves and crumbs. He minded his own business. If he occasionally tickled a leg or two it was purely accidental. But he was ousted by his cousin, the more vicious red ant known locally as 'L'Argentina'. He is neither garden- nor house-friendly. He can be found indoors, in bedrooms, kitchens, clustered around bathroom taps, and on the newly arrived visitor's hoard of sweets and chocolates!

In the garden he and his like crawl over trees and bushes, teem under stones and build nests in the ground. No nook or cranny is free from their invading presence. They carry diseases and encourage the more destructive pests, such as aphids and the dreaded scale insect.

When our orange trees changed from glossy green to black almost overnight we were shocked. The surface of the leaves was covered in a soot-like, sticky substance, while the underside was dotted with small tank-shaped objects. Ants swarmed on the trunk, branches, twigs and leaves. A quick check round the garden showed that the symptoms had

spread to the peach and apricot trees, and to our prize oleanders. We decided it was time to act.

Our elderly Ligurian neighbour glanced quickly at the damage and muttered in dialect 'U le la cuciniia, o vu u suufo'; this, roughly translated, means 'it's the coccidae (scale insect), you need sulphate'. He gave us a large can full of a blue liquid which we sprayed liberally on trees and shrubs.

The leaves turned from black to blue-green. We hoped the problem had been solved. No such luck. One heavy downpour, the copper sulphate washed away while the soot reappeared. So did the ants.

We went to our local gardening Co-op store for help. The little lady who sits behind a counter with only her head and shoulders visible listened politely to our broken Italian and grunted, 'It's the ants! Get rid of them. They carry diseases'. She is never eloquent. 'How?' we asked. 'Vischio!' and she sold us a fat tube of it. As we left the shop she called out, 'Spread a ring of it round the trunk of each tree.'

From our dictionary we learnt that Vischio is bird-lime. For the uninitiated it is a sticky substance for catching birds and, we hoped, ants!

Spreading a ring of it round a tree was a messy job. It got into our hair, oozed down the trunk and settled on the cat. It stuck to our hands, clothes and the dog. The wily ants simply laid a bridge of dead bodies across it and they were back. So was the scale insect.

We returned to the Co-op store. It was market day and the shop was packed. A knot of sympathizers gathered round us as we moaned about our problem.

'Try spraying with a solution of soda to eight parts of water', said one of them.

'Washing up liquid', said another.

'Dig this into the soil', suggested a third, brandishing a tin advertising swift death to all ants and, incidentally, to any plant that happened to be lying around.

We were rescued by the Co-op lady's husband. He was burly and unshaven and he asked, 'Have you tried this?' He pushed an orange plastic tube into our hands. It contained a foul-smelling powder to be sprinkled round the base of

ant-infested trees and bushes. Innocuous to plants and animals.

We bought it and we sprinkled. To our amazement, the ants disappeared overnight. It took a little longer for the soot to fall off, but it did.

The other day our local gardening expert refused to believe that we had conquered the scale insect by getting rid of the ants. He said it was impossible. He said we should spray with malathion.

Who were we to contradict him? But as long as our fruit trees remain ant- and soot-free, we shall continue to use the powder* and sprinkle as often as needed.

* Geodinfos G8 - an Italian product manufactured by SIAPA, Rome, and approved by the Health Ministry in 1974.

A DATABASE OF PLANT NURSERIES FOR MEMBERS OF THE MGS

Duncan Ackery & Hamish Warren

We already have a list of nurseries on a personal computer and it would not be too difficult to expand this to a larger register for use by MGS members.

Various points need to be made.

1. This would be only a list of nurseries and could not provide information on the availability of an individual plant; however, we would attempt to keep an up-to-date catalogue from each nursery. Some nurseries do not have a catalogue, of course, or the listing may be incomplete, particularly for rarer items.
2. Where possible we are including a contact name at the nursery. We need to ensure that the data in the list are not only up-to-date but accurate and comprehensive: for instance, we are including all the national telephone codes so that there is no ambiguity when trying to phone.
3. Both indigenous and garden plant nurseries would be included. It is probable that most members would be interested in the range of garden plants available, whether native or not.
4. Nurseries in the other mediterranean zones would be included. Personal experience has shown that certain bulbs and plants can only be found locally, in, say, South Africa or New Zealand.
5. Probably some seed and plant merchants from northern Europe might also be included if they provide special expertise (e.g. the British National Passiflora collection) or offer a wide range of suitable plants.
6. Members would be encouraged to send details of suitable nurseries for inclusion in the database. This should include as much information as possible, including a catalogue, telephone and fax number, as well as e-mail address. Details of the local soil and climate should also be included.
7. It might also be helpful if agreement to be listed was obtained from the nursery. Although most may be glad of the

free advertisement, some smaller specialist growers might feel unable to cope with the demand.

8. In the future perhaps we can persuade nurseries to up-date their entries automatically each year (perhaps even free of charge in view of the potential increase in business that could result!).

9. We anticipate that members would contact us in writing (fax or letter) to request details of nurseries in the district where they live, or are visiting, or those that they wish to communicate with.

10. In the future it might be worth grouping the French nurseries, say, in terms of their geographical district to make it easier for members who intend visiting a particular area.

11. We also have a book list for the help of those gardening in mediterranean climates.

At least this would be a positive start. How it would develop and whether it would become too onerous or expensive remains to be seen. If it went well it might eventually form the basis for a 'plant finder' publication, which would list plants (using botanical names and the *RHS Dictionary of Gardening*) and cross-reference this list with names of nurseries. This would be a much larger task which might be accomplished by a group linked through the Internet. Such a publication could be similar to those published at present in individual countries, but would require expansion to cover problems of trade restrictions and payment in different countries.

Perhaps in the interim members who are finding it difficult to obtain a particular plant could state their requirements in *The Mediterranean Garden*, in the hope that someone might be able to help them.

We would certainly welcome as much feedback as possible from members.

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A MEDITERRANEAN PLANT FINDER

Heidi Gildemeister

When I first mentioned a Mediterranean Plant Finder, I did not have anything fancy in mind – just a list of a few pages to begin with, which over the years would grow into whatever then would be considered essential. Assembling such a list may or may not be difficult, but it is already on its way, much more quickly than I thought. Members seem to like the idea, since a few good addresses where mediterranean plants are sold have already appeared. In *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 3 Piero Caneti tells us about a new nursery in Italy which sells plants suited to the mediterranean climate with its long, hot, dry summers. And these nurseries seem to be popping up like mushrooms on a spring meadow. Soon I shall discover where to find *Pistacia vera*, the pistachio nut, for so long on my ‘wanted list’.

Our present gardens have been influenced by many factors. Yet, on reading carefully what members write in the Journal, it looks to me as if all of us were seeking *Mediterranean* roots. What has been here for centuries past, what still grows on the hillsides and in the fields around us? Am I wrong to assume that many mediterranean gardeners think along the same lines? That priority goes to the basic, sturdy and reliable mediterranean plants, mostly evergreen, if possible long-flowering, healthy and dependable in our difficult climate, yet beautiful in their unassuming ways (*Arbutus*, *Artemisia*, *Erica*, *Laurus*, *Myrtus*, *Phlomis*; every juniper, lavender, lentisk, rosemary, sage and thyme; all fruit and nut trees such as almonds, figs, vines, plums; or the many cheerful bulbs). Plants which do not impose on our time or water (we can always keep a few cherished water-consuming ones near a tap).

‘Rare’ plants (strange variegations, fancy cultivars, ‘exotics’ which demand summer water or high air humidity, or the very challenging ones which require coddling and are a quick prey to pests and diseases) could be left for later – if by then we still

wanted them. As a matter of fact, Derek Toms' list of 'Home Grown Varieties' has set a first cornerstone on which to go on building.

I should like to recommend Pépinière Filippi, Route Nationale 113, F-34140 Mèze (Languedoc-Roussillon), tel. 67 43 88 69, fax 67 43 84 59. I met Olivier Filippi last autumn at Courson and was impressed by his sensible and wide choice of healthy mediterranean-climate plants, among them many essential ground covers with beautiful foliage, yet all perfectly suited to the difficult conditions that our mediterranean gardens have to face.



Cistus × purpureus

THE GARDEN IN SUMMER

Jenny Bussey

POT PLANTS

The mediterranean climate in summer is not kind to plants grown in pots. Whether indoors or out, thought must be given to where your pots are placed to minimise the stress caused by hot, bright sun and by low rainfall and humidity, aggravated by the hot, dry winds that blow in the afternoon.

If possible, therefore, move your pots to places where they only get direct sun for part of the day, preferably in the morning or evening, not at midday, and where they are protected from those south winds. Although many succulent plants, including geraniums, will tolerate full sun, they will look better if they get some shade. The sun and wind will not only dry the plants out, they bleach the colour out of leaves too. Pots standing in full sun also get very hot, baking the roots inside – especially black plastic pots which should always be shaded to avoid this happening.

Regular watering is important and, at this time of year, it is better to have a shallow container under each pot so that water is soaked up by the compost efficiently. In this way earthenware pots stay damp and evaporation from the outside helps to keep roots cool. If you are worried that the roots may become waterlogged, put some gravel in the saucer and stand the pot on this. The extra water will also raise humidity around the plant, helping to keep it in good condition; if plants are placed in groups, this effect is increased. A layer of gravel or small stones on the soil surface will reduce evaporation, stop the surface becoming baked hard, and also stop earth splashing out when you water.

Plants that flower through the summer will need regular feeding with a high potash fertiliser – there are many on the market to choose from, for instance liquids which can be added to the water at quarter- to half-strength each time, or slow-release granules that can be sprinkled on the surface of the pot to last for about three months. Many other plants, however, slow down their growth in the summer heat and

should be allowed to rest, keeping the compost just moist and not feeding them. Many bulbous plants that flower in the spring, then build up their bulbs for the next year, should be allowed to dry out completely now – turn their pots on their sides and put in a shady place until the autumn. Christmas cacti also need a period of rest in the summer, with minimum watering, to produce flower buds later in the year.

Pests and fungal diseases can appear and spread very quickly in summer and it is a good idea to check your pots regularly for the first signs of trouble and to take remedial steps immediately. Some pests are not visible to the naked eye, and a magnifying glass may be necessary to identify the problem – always look at the back of the leaves as this is where pests may live and breed.

THE FLOWER GARDEN

Much of the above advice also applies to plants grown in the garden. Whereas in cooler climates the problem is getting plants through their first winter, in the Mediterranean it is the first summer that can kill a new plant. The hot sun, the wind, the lack of rain all stress a plant trying to settle in, and it is up to us to make sure that they are shaded, if necessary, and watered thoroughly and regularly. Remember, an inch of water on the surface only penetrates into dry soil about four inches, so to get water down 12-15 inches where (one hopes) new roots are forming, you will need to give 3-4 inches of water. A good mulch and a drip watering system make water use more effective and long-lasting. Apply the water away from the main stem of the plant, under the 'drip-line', to encourage the roots to spread outwards and downwards.

There are many mediterranean plants, however, that do not want any water in summer once they are established. They have adapted to the drought conditions in many ways and watering them upsets their rhythm with the seasons and can thus result in their death. They will not look their best now, but come the natural autumn rains and cooler temperatures and they will reward your patience and forbearance with a magnificent show of new growth and flowers. Many of these plants are aromatic herbs and woody plants, their leaves altered

to resist the heat (thickened, shiny, reduced in size, covered in fur, etc.); others have succulent leaves, stems or roots which may shrivel up to some extent but revive dramatically in autumn. Spring-flowering bulbs, such as freesias, ixias, babianas, sparaxis, etc. (mostly from South Africa) like to be well baked in the summer sun and may well rot if watered.

THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

All the summer fruiting vegetables thrive in the heat but, being mostly from the tropics, require regular watering to do best. If you cannot water much, you can still grow them but they will need to be well spaced out so that each plant's roots can spread to find the water it needs, and a surface mulch will help to maintain moisture in the soil. If the soil surface becomes baked hard water is liable to evaporate, so keep the surface hoed at all times – in fact, two or three inches of dry soil makes a very efficient mulch.

Fruits that grow on vines, such as courgettes, cucumbers, melons, etc., are best trained up off the ground. Even though the fruits are heavy, the stems are strong enough to hold them and getting them up a string, pole or over a pergola or arch helps keep them healthy and the fruit clean.

There is a wide variety of beans that can be grown in summer, and picking them regularly will ensure a long cropping period. If you want to try lettuces and radishes for salads, shade and plenty of water will be needed at this time.

THE FRUIT GARDEN

Many Mediterranean fruits and nuts mature during the summer, ready for harvest in the autumn and winter. The main task, therefore, is to ensure a good, clean crop, free from pests and diseases – not always easy when one only has a few of this and a few of that! Vigilance now will catch problems early or, even better, prevent them. Mediterranean fruit flies attack citrus fruit and olives, for instance, and where these are grown intensively aerial spraying against them is usually done at the opportune moment: in Spain they use non-toxic products that interfere with the normal life-cycle of the pest but are harmless to other animals – so there is no need to complain that 'they' are poisoning us or our pets!



BOOKS

The Art of French Vegetable Gardening

by Louisa Jones

Photographs by Gilles le Scanff and Joelle Caroline Mayer

Published by Artisan, a Division of Workman Publishing, New York, 1995. US\$ 35.00.

Hardcover, 208 pages with 175 full colour photographs and 80 recipe suggestions.

When this august Society asked me to contribute a book review and I was just told the title and that it was in the post, I had a tremor of ambivalence before accepting. Did being French, a lover of the good produce of France's fertile *potagers* and good books entitle me, a second generation city-dweller, to review a book that might turn out to be dauntingly technical in horticultural terms? To assess the pros and cons of practical gardening techniques in a spring-bound manual designed for the garden shed printed on weather-proof and scateur-proof modular how-to fact-sheet cards? At another level, I wondered how France, of which the Mediterranean part cannot be more than a third of its total area, could be a useful model for Mediterranean gardening. Anyway, I accepted and *non, je ne regrette rien!*

The book is definitely not designed for the shed, but for the *salon*. It is an extremely rich and sophisticated book. The elegance of its design does justice to the text and illustrations, both of which are as inviting as the superb fresh tomatoes on

the cover – which reassured me somewhat as to the book’s Med-relevance.

The way in which Louisa Jones has arranged her material manages to be both rational and enticing. Through the half-open gate of the frontispiece, a splendid dawn or early evening view into an archetypal *potager*, the reader is led to consider the broader issues of design in the first four chapters. Historical background, literary references and practical advice are effortlessly given to the reader concerning the two main styles of decorative vegetable gardens. With the antithesis between the classical formalism of the Versailles garden created for Louis XIV and the romantic studied profusion of the rural *jardins de curé* or 19th century urban plots, Louisa Jones evokes the creative tension between the *genres* which underlies so much greatness in all the arts for which France is famous.

The chapters entitled The Beautiful Vegetables, Flowers and Herbs & Aromatics offer a wealth of tips and suggestions, examples and ideas covering the whole range of produce available to the gardener who wishes to apply his art to growing vegetables... and fruit, by the way. While all the information conveyed is useful and precise, in these three chapters and the final two, Seasons and Repose, the tone remains philosophical and meandering. France’s enormous geographic and climatic diversity is given serious consideration at every step. The book is never dogmatic or pedantic. The many literary anecdotes scattered throughout the text, culled with visibly passionate research on the subject, provide an added, often humorous, dimension to a subject where the visual arts inevitably fall short: fragrance. The magnificent still-life photographs, far from being *nature mortes*, give life to all the gardens described. They make the reader want to touch, pick, smell... the winter pictures make me shiver as I write in a Rome heat-wave!

The only ‘faults’ I can find in the book are either eminently pardonable or endearing. They consist of omissions which are either wilful, such as the lack of any mention of soil-enrichment or pest control methods which are not organic (a clear sign that no multinational sponsorship is behind this publishing venture), or due to my point about Mediterranean

conditions being secondary in the book's global scope – no mention of acanthus or agapanthus as splendid border or vertical elements. The pleasure and relative usefulness of gardening with cats, frogs, toads and bats are well covered but no mention is made of tortoises, geckos or lizards!

If the body of the text and illustrations are entirely satisfying to a neophyte like myself, it is also due to the fact that the twenty-page reference section at the back of the book has been prepared with the utmost care. It comprises an excellent index, Ideas for Designing the Potager, Seed Sources (US and France only), Gardens Cited Open to the Public, Books Consulted and, *most* important of all, the *raison d'être* of the art of French vegetable gardening: 80 classic French recipe suggestions! I am tempted to say that this is what makes Louisa Jones to vegetable gardening in France what Izaak Walton was to angling in England.

Louis Marcelin-Rice

(*Editor's note:* Louisa Jones has just written some pages, in French and English, on gardens of Provence for the Internet, at the request of the server 'enprovence.com' who is compiling a whole lot of documents on different aspects of life in Provence. Her article includes some addresses of nurseries and gardens open to the public. There is also, for example, an article by the French Association for the Preservation of the Mediterranean Forest. Anyone having access to the Web could read this at the following electronic address: <http://www/laprovence.com>.)

NOTES:

Southern California Gardens by Victoria Padilla,

photographs, Allen A. Knoll, publishers, 1994, 359 pp, \$39.95.

This, perhaps the best single book on the floral history of this section of the state, has been beautifully reprinted – much better than the original edition.

Lotusland: A Photographic Odyssey, text by T.R.Gardner II, photographs, Allen A. Knoll, publishers, 1995, 144 pp, hardcover, \$59.50.

Large and spectacular – not a garden book as such but rather history. May well become a collectors' item.

LETTERS

I am building up an Umbelliferae/Apiaceae collection and I need seeds, especially from spontaneous plants. Anyone who is willing to help me might collect seeds from around their home, along roadsides etc. I would be most grateful to any members of the MGS who could take the trouble to send me seeds, and in return I'd be happy to offer my list of seeds available. Indeed, what about establishing a Mediterranean Garden Society Seed List in order to make it easier for members to exchange seeds?

*Eliano Pallaro,
via Palermo 43,
Cairate (VA), Italy*

Can any member of the MGS help? I am looking for parts 78 and 84 of the Marshall Cavendish Encyclopaedia of Gardening, published in 1968 in the form of numbered issues. If anyone has any idea where or how I could get hold of these two missing parts I'd be most grateful.

*Graziella Seferiades,
Kifissia, Greece*

Marjorie Holmes's article on roses (*The Mediterranean Garden* No. 3) was great – it would be useful to get a list together of roses that work in the different regions. Roses were to be found in every old farmhouse here in Tuscany and although the old varieties I inherited are beautifully perfumed, they are prone to black spot, die-back and balling. I keep them because they 'belong', not because they work. Many of Marjorie's comments concur with my own experience, although the banksia roses I can't have here – far too exposed and not enough space – but they flourish in the old villas of Firenze. The China roses seem well suited to this climate. I have always had Monthly Blush, which goes as well in a pot as in the garden. Lord Acton used it as underplanting along the entrance avenue of cypresses at Villa La Pietra. It had been used similarly in an old villa I knew in Arezzo. I'm trying to find another *R. chinensis* 'Sophie's

Blush' which appeared in the last Barni (a well-known local rose producer) catalogue. I'm surprised no one has mentioned *R. chinensis* f. *mutabilis* (I suspect its name has recently been changed). It's becoming in danger of being overplanted here but it *is* remarkably tough and has a very long flowering period (though a bit difficult to use in mixed plantings).

Judith MacDonald,
Lucigagno, Italy

(Correction: The reference to *Myrtus communis* in Judith MacDonald's article in *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 4 should have read *Myrtus communis* var. *tarentina*. This is a darker, smaller-leaved variety.)

Hugo Latymer's article (*The Mediterranean Garden* No. 3) is most fascinating, if occasionally amusing. At last garden centres in this area are being a little more adventurous, if cautious. A wider range of species is being stocked though they are only buying-in about ten of each at a time. What is interesting is that these more unusual plants are sold very quickly. So a market definitely exists.

I can recommend the shrub *Iochroma cyaneum*. Growing to 2m its downy-grey leaves look good except in cold weather. Flowering for many months, the clusters of steely-blue, tubular flowers are much admired. A useful addition to the group of 'blue' shrubs. Not affected by insects or fungi and watering is minimal.

The Australian climber *Hibbertia scandens* is another repeat flowerer. The flowers, rather like a yellow Christmas rose, last only a few days but keep coming, over many months. An evergreen climber, it does need some support to twine through. A useful summer flowering yellow climber which is hardy for the colder areas. Minimal summer watering in rather poor soil, well drained. So far no disease.

Evergreen *Metrosideros excelsa*, from New Zealand, flowered the first summer; the clusters of vermilion stamens contrasting well against the grey-green foliage. Slow growing, only shrub size at the moment, this looks as though it will do well in this dry climate. Local Councils have started to plant it in public areas so it must have potential.

Another find was *Dicliptera suberecta* [now *D. sericea*] from Uruguay. Forming a low mound about 60 cm across, the velvety pale green leaves are a good foil for the clusters of pale orange, tubular flowers, borne on short spikes. Rarely watered in full sun it flowered profusely from June to October. Slightly affected by frost (-3°C), the plant quickly recovered. Cuttings taken in September rooted easily in a mixture of 50/50 peat and Perlite. No disease or insect damage noticed. Last year I noticed its use as a ground cover at Valencia Botanic Gardens.

It's a pleasure to find plants which tolerate the dry climate and yet manage to flower well with a minimum of attention. I find it is necessary to search the plant centres continually because they don't provide lists of what they stock or can buy-in. Time consuming but sometimes productive.

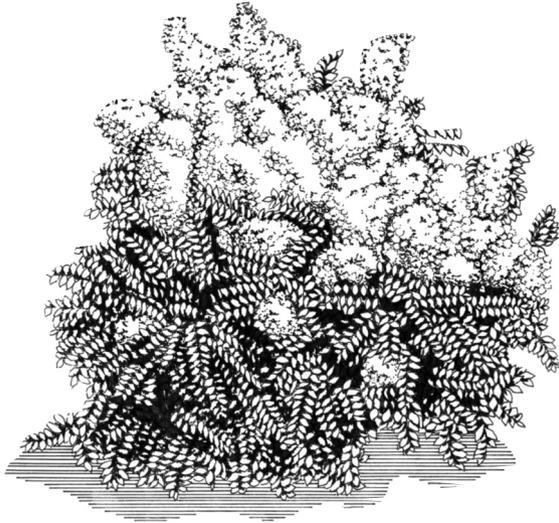
John M. Calderwood,
Lliver, Alicante, Spain

I read with interest the article on Acacias (*The Mediterranean Garden* No. 1). I noticed to my astonishment, though, that my particular favourite, *Acacia podalyriifolia*, was not listed. This is an 'evergreen bushy shrub, H and S 3 m. Half-hardy. Has rounded, sharply-pointed, silver-blue phyllodes. Long racemes of fragrant yellow flowers are open in winter or early spring.' (Description from the RHS *Gardeners' Encyclopaedia of Plants and Flowers*.)

There was a large specimen in the first garden I owned on this island in 1980, and I was told it was unique here. (It was tragically cut down and killed when I left there.)

On my first visit to South Africa in 1983 I saw the same acacia flowering in the wild in many places.

In 1988 I bought another house and set about creating a garden from the surrounding holm oak and pine wood. On a visit to a garden centre I was excited to find six small specimens 35-40 cm high, and bought one. My bush now stands 3 m high and as much across. Each year it delights me, flowering from mid-December through to the end of March, when I prune it severely. Its new bright silver growth starts rapidly, and by September the buds are developing like seed



Acacia podalyrifolia

pearls. (Hence its common name ‘Pearl Acacia’?) It is still very rare on this island.

Unfortunately it has proved impossible to propagate, although my friends and I have tried from seeds and cuttings for many years. The seedlings (with pinnate juvenile leaves like the ‘mimosa’) sprout, but expire before they reach 10 cm high (whatever season I start them) or before their adult elliptic leaves develop. I have even tried the ‘Baptism by Fire’ method!

Do you or any of your readers know the secret? Or does it have to be grafted, and if so, on to what stock?

Rosemary Bentley,
ESRA (North) Garden Club,
Mallorca, Spain

Derek Toms suggests in ‘Home Grown Varieties’ (*The Mediterranean Garden* No. 3) that readers may have other plants to add to the list. I should like to suggest the following: *Amelanchier ovalis*, *Celtis australis*, the Homeric soporific, *Euonymus europaeus*, *Asparagus acutifolius* (delicious), *Clematis vitalba*, *Coronilla emerus* [now *Hippocrepis emerus*], *C. valentina*

subsp. *glauca*, *Hippophae rhamnoides* [now *Elaeagnus rhamnoides*], *Aphyllanthes monspeliensis*, *Glaucium corniculatum amarantiacium* [now considered a synonym of *G. corniculatum*] *Dianthus* sp., *Platycapnos spicatus*, *Romulea* sp., *Salvia verbenaca*, *Satureja montana*, *Silene coronaria*, *Urospermum dalechampii* (brilliant), *Iris lutescens* (the ex-*I. chamaeiris* in variety, stemmed and unstemmed, botanists be damned), *Narcissus dubius*, *N. requienii* [now *N. assoanus*], *Scilla autumnalis* [now *Prospero autumnale*] (delicate in the pine woods), and so on. All of these plants grow near here.

Tom Wellsted,
Luynes, France

Derek Toms raises an important matter when he argues for the use of Latin names for plants rather than colloquial ones. By using the Latin name, he rightly points out, we would avoid ambiguity. For example, if people would only use the word *Acacia*, then they wouldn't make the mistake of confusing wattles with the mimosa. More than that though. The use of the Latin name alerts us to other, similar members of a family whose relationship might not otherwise be at all obvious.

I guess that many common names for plants have distant origins for those of you who come from the Northern Hemisphere. Certainly many of them are delightful. However, consider that plants, animals and even star constellations found only in the Southern Hemisphere are of much more recent discovery and many simply never earned a common name. Those that did, of course, tended to gain names that are of little practical use: e.g. 'gum tree' for a Eucalypt or 'tea tree' for a *Leptospermum*. 'Bottlebrush' covers several quite different species, as does 'Kangaroo' in the animal kingdom – hence the common name is not very helpful.

Over here in Greece, I would find it useful if the few plants that are available for sale had a label of any kind, but there would be no confusion if, when labelling plants becomes accepted here, they were marked with a Latin name.

Richard Morrish,
Tolo, Greece

About Provençal roundabouts (traffic islands in my dialect), these first began to be constructed in the early eighties if I recall correctly, all over France. They were called ‘*cercles giratoires*’ in those days but thank goodness have now deflated to simple *ronds-points*. The first ones near Avignon were planted with lush lawn and bedding plants which sometimes spelled out the names of the towns (Bagnols was one of these). But in recent years, not only near Aix, there has been a trend towards more drought-resistant plantings and more local character: cypresses, olives and lavender in particular. I think personally that this is to be applauded even if it still can be a bit kitsch at times.

A Parisian garden designer transplanted to Provence tells me his customers want instant gardens featuring olive trees, cypresses and lavender beds, though they still want emerald lawns around the lavender. A recent visitor from Santa Barbara, California, told me about a landscape architect who has made a name for himself there by planting a field of lavender rather than lawn. Surely a good idea.

Where I now live most of the time, on the edge of the Cévennes, there has been an even more dramatic departure from the old ways. Traffic islands are being built with lines of low, dry-set stone walls (like those of local terraced hillsides) and graded slopes planted with rough grass, high in spring and dry in summer, with old olive trees and, in one case, a construction of stone slabs somewhat resembling the pre-historic menhirs which can be found around here. Very simple and very effective. It was even better without the olive trees and I feared lavender, but so far none has appeared. Lavender makes a good garden plant here but has nothing to do with traditional rural landscapes in the Cévennes, as it does in the Mont Ventoux area for example.

And although I love lavender in its many varieties, I get a little tired of its being considered a symbol of Provence. Once, in the hanging gardens of the elegant eighteenth-century prefecture in Avignon, the wife of the then reigning prefect told me she had planted a bit of lavender so her garden would be more Provençal. These old Provençal townhouse gardens, like those of the country châteaux, never had lavender but

box, laurustinus and acanthus. They were GREEN, not grey. After visiting several hundred gardens in south-eastern France in the last ten years, I do believe acanthus is the most common plant to be found in all types of Provençal plantings, not lavender. But perhaps, like the olive tree, acanthus is a constant in Mediterranean gardens?

About roses: the musk roses mentioned by Marjorie Holmes grow very well for me (in a plot mixed with artichokes and various perennials) and also 'Queen Elizabeth', 'Iceberg' and 'New Dawn'. So perhaps others which do well here would also do well for her? 'Gloire de Dijon', 'Robin Hood', 'Félicité et Perpétue', 'Aloha', 'Nathalie', 'Veilchenblau', 'Rêve d'Or', 'Souvenir de Claudius Denoyel', 'Lady Hillingdon' and 'Auguste Gervais', a wonderful rose. I got most of the older varieties from Bernard Bureau some ten years ago but more recently from the excellent collection at the Roseraie de Berty at Largentière (already cited in your pages, but the address is: Eléonore Cruse, Roseraie de Berty, 07110 Largentière, Tel. (33) 75 88 30 56, Fax (33) 75 88 36 93. *Rosa rubifolia* is always a bit fragile here, but otherwise I have not had trouble, perhaps because my soil is neutral-acid? But we also have very hot summer temperatures and mild winters (our olive trees did not die in the winter of 1985, whereas many further south did).

From my experience visiting other gardens, I would first like to say that 'Iceberg' has become a glut on the market. Lovely as it is, I am finding it (along with three-hundred-year-old-olive-trees-in-lawns) in every recently created Provençal garden. Sometimes to the exclusion of all other varieties. Of course people should plant what they like, whether it is fashionable or not, but perhaps some other choices might prove equally elegant?

In many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Provençal gardens there is a climber with flowers like those of 'Robin Hood' for which I have yet to discover a name; it flowers only in early June and is very lovely. In the same gardens can often be found the single-flowered yellow *Rosa banksiae*.

On the Riviera, two roses almost seem to be signature plants of old gardens there: 'Lafollette' (sometimes called 'Sénateur Lafollette') and 'Général Schablikine'. The former, a

rambler, is such a beauty that several garden owners who possess it regularly announce to me when it is in flower. It is true that it is very early and its coming is a real event.

Mediterranean gardeners wanting roses might try the Nabonnand creations and also think about using southern rootstocks. If I may, I will quote a passage on these (related) subjects from an article I wrote on roses at Grasse a few years back in *Hortus*:

“The reigning rose of Grasse is *Rosa × centifolia*, the cabbage rose, produced through hybridization in Holland from *Rosa gallica* (the latter sometimes called by French experts the ‘rose de Provins’ or ‘rose de Provence’). The cultivar most used in the perfume industry today was created by Gilbert Nabonnand in 1895, a single-flowered, thornless plant called the ‘Rose de mai’.

Gilbert Nabonnand, a French rose producer from Avignon who eventually settled in Golfe-Juan in 1860, deserves to be better known. When English chancellor Lord Brougham decided to stay in the obscure fishing community of Cannes, thus launching the entire phenomenon of the French Riviera, he asked Nabonnand to design the park of his opulent villa Eléonore-Louise. In particular, Nabonnand laid out the rose garden. The creation of the winter-blooming ‘Général Schablikine’ is attributed to him, about which Lord Brougham is reported to have said ‘This of all roses serves us the most faithfully and generously.’

Today the May rose is often grafted on to ‘Indica Major’ or ‘Frédica’, to prevent layering and improve production. The latter (a cross between ‘Indica Major’ and *Rosa multiflora*) was specifically developed by the agricultural research centre at Fréjus for the perfume industry. It allows for earlier flowering, extending the harvest period but of course also risking greater exposure to the late frosts – which can be lethal even on the French Riviera! A multi-petalled variant, the double May rose, developed by Lunier, is grown in smaller quantities. So it is that between mid-May and early June perfume factories in Grasse treat more than 300 tons of *Rosa × centifolia* (about a sixth of which are the double-flowered variety.”

Finally, I would strongly recommend a book written by a real Mediterranean rose expert living and gardening in Antibes, Marie-Thérèse Haudebourg, and published this year by Hachette: *Les Roses dans les Jardins*, cataloguing with infinite patience – and accuracy – some 1200 roses, including those produced by Mediterranean developers.

Last comment on compost. I have been composting in a mediterranean climate for 20 years in a rather disorganized manner, but without difficulty. And without watering. In two bins near the house we pile our kitchen scraps (often wet, it is true) and garden wastes, alternating as each fills up to let the pile mature. I sometimes add lime and a handful of dried blood, and we get well-rotted compost that I put around nearby roses and artichokes. This year I had to wait till spring because an animal, I think a hedgehog, chose to hibernate in the maturing bin.

In wet springs like this one I also pile garden waste (there is so much of it!) at various places where I delude myself that it does not show, and piles I made in March are already half rotted now in early June and we may get showers once or twice in July (without hailstones, if we are lucky) and thunderstorms after August 15 (if we are lucky) before the heavy autumn rains of September (which leave a little topsoil, if we are lucky).

I don't know why we are able to make compost – or perhaps what we get would not be considered real compost by a meticulous gardener. But for what it is worth for purposes of comparison, this is our experience.

*Louisa Jones,
Payzac, France*

With regard to Grace Kiernan's article on La Mortola (*The Mediterranean Garden* No. 3), I would like to 'save my honour' and note that the nursery she mentions was, until his untimely death, run by Franco – alas, I can now no longer remember his surname. I discovered the nursery on one of my visits to the garden in the late 1960s and was most impressed by the quantity of rare roses they had for sale. I returned with my Hilliers Manual, the then Bible for rose growers, in order to check whether the roses would be suited to this part of the

world. Franco was so impressed by the book that I sent him a copy. He sold me *R. laevigata*, *R. webbiana*, *R. nulkana*, *R. multiflora*, *R. brunonii* [now *R. moschata*], *R. × damascena*, *R. setigera* – the Prairie rose – and *R. villosa*. Unfortunately there is no longer a nursery and, as Sergio Orrao points out in his letter, the University of Genoa is not permitted to run a money-making concern. Would that we could persuade the authorities to change their minds. Perhaps one day – who knows? – a nursery could be run by the Amici?

A propos of Tom Wellsted's article on *Hunnemania* (*The Mediterranean Garden* No. 3), if anyone is interested in acquiring this delightful plant it may be obtained from:

Dr. & Mrs. Cuche,
Devant Ville,
83830 Claviers, (Var), France.
Tel. (33) 94 76 63 91.

Their garden and nursery are well worth a visit – by appointment only – as they have a large stock of interesting and unusual plants. They supply a catalogue on demand for 20 frs. and they also have *Rosa bracteata* (see Marjorie Holmes's article).

I much enjoyed Tim Longville's delightfully humorous and erudite article on *Salvias*. For anyone wishing to acquire some of these plants there is a specialist nursery offering a huge range of *salvias*:

Pépinières de la Foux,
Chemin de la Foux,
83229 Le Pradet (Var - near Toulon), France.

Monsieur Jourdan, the owner, is a charming man who has just organised a marvellous plant exhibition – a mini-Chelsea – in his home town of Le Pradet. Unfortunately there is no mail order – you just have to go there and it is very well worth it!

Finally, to the compost heap: may I persuade Mr. A. Martorell to disregard what Yve Menzies and Hugo Latymer say about compost making (apologies to Yve and Hugo). We keep *all* our kitchen waste – fruit peel, potato peelings, tired lettuce, eggshells (squashed up to make them rot more quickly), anything, in fact, that we do not eat. We pile this waste into a concrete trough with an earth bottom and add

grass cuttings, old newspapers and small and easily rottable waste from the garden (not large woody things as we do not have a shredder. These we burn – when we are allowed to – and add the ashes to the compost). We have just dug over the heap – after one year – and put it through a large upright sieve, supported by struts, and have obtained the most delicious dark friable compost imaginable! I cannot recommend it too highly, and if you have the space you can keep three or four heaps going and never be without this lovely dark mulch.

*Joanna Millar,
Tourettes-sur-Loup, France*

Although I remember compost as a household world from my childhood days in Switzerland, compost making may not have been a widespread practice in Mediterranean lands. Today, though, mulches and compost are moving more and more into the limelight. In *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 2, David Fairhall wonders whether it is worth attempting to make compost in our climate, and in No. 3 A. Martorell discusses the question at length. This encourages me to say a few words on the subject – though perhaps it may be more than a few, since I tend to get carried away when the conversation turns to mulching.

When I first came to the place which today is my garden, ‘green waste’ – as it is called today – was burnt. One knew how to build a fire and how to keep it alive. Somebody had to tend it – usually me – until all the refuse had burnt down. When materials were green, this resulted in more smoke than fire. I found the procedure a waste of time, labour and material, and as I am basically against waste I began to wonder what other ways could be found.

We started composting. A shaded spot was found under a tall and wide oak tree and stones were cleared away. Then we piled material, pulled apart or roughly cut up, alternating woody material with green material, added kitchen waste or old baskets, grass clippings in thin layers with, every now and then, a layer of soil. My young garden help trampled the heap down a bit to make it more ‘manageable’ (not too much, so that it would not compact). Whenever we had more waste, we added

on to it. This was winter work and winter rains kept the heap humid. By the time summer came, it had settled down. We covered it with pine branches and forgot about it until autumn. In a 'good' year, the heap was watered every now and then.

When garden work was recommenced in autumn, we opened up the heap. Part of the green waste had turned into dark brown, fertile soil which was put through a sieve and handed out to those plants which were in need of help. Woody pieces which did not pass through the sieve were added on to the new heap. Sometimes there was only a little soil and much woody material, so we decided to give it another year and simply turned the heap over, making room for the new one. To speed up the procedure, after a few years we acquired a small shredder whose knives, unfortunately, required frequent sharpening and then expertise to reinstall them.

Palm leaves are 'indigestible' even for the sturdiest shredder, some agave leaves too. Addicted to composting as I was, I did not want to go back to burning to dispose of them. Instead, I suggested a separate compost heap in a distant but very shaded corner of the garden where this material could be left to rot for years, much against the opinion of those 'who knew better'. Years later, the place had become untidy and a kind soul took the heap apart. To my own surprise, it revealed at its bottom a generous harvest of the finest brown earth.

At times, I tried to familiarise myself with 'real' composting, learned about its many advantages, remembered some basic guidelines and made a few attempts, but time was always too short (I wanted to write my *Mediterranean Gardening* book, take photographs for it, enlarge the plant choice, establish index cards.)

As plants grew (and thus green waste) and as the garden increased in size, we reversed the whole procedure. We brought the shredder (by now a hammermill which needs little maintenance) to the place where the winter clean-up was being carried out and fed the refuse into it, right there. Small branches, green leaves, pulled out weeds with some soil still attached to their roots turned into a good mixture. Whenever we remembered, we added whichever meals were locally available in bulk (hoof and horn, meat or fish, or bone if

stronger alkalinity was desired). Variety was our aim. Once the refuse was processed (twice for finer texture), we piled the material generously around each plant (we still do), right then and there. When we finish with one area of the garden, we pull the shredder to the next one.

So, what have the results been? Gradually the mulch decomposes, more quickly in winter, and we replenish it whenever more material is available, as generously as possible. The thick layer of mulch keeps humidity in the soil and protects it from drying out in summer. Beneath the mulch fertile brown earth develops, teeming with soil life, which feeds our plants and allows them to thrive. Plants are healthy and vigorous, spared by most pests and diseases.

This rather unorthodox procedure serves my ends. Other gardeners' experiences may differ from it, but it is thanks to mulch and compost that my garden thrives. Where 20 years ago there was bedrock, worn bare by winter rains and the hooves of passing sheep, where little more than brambles and *Euphorbia* survived, today I can pick flowers in my garden every month of the year, in spring enjoying wafts of scent from freesias, narcissi or jasmine, in summer walking in shade in an open Mediterranean woodland.

*Heidi Gildemeister,
Balears, Spain*

I manage to make quite respectable compost here in Spain, often very quickly because of the heat, by the following method:

1. Create a pit, either by digging out a hole in the ground about 1 square metre in size and half a metre deep, ensuring that drainage is good, or by using building breeze blocks to similar dimensions. A series of two or three pits will ensure a continuous supply of ready-to-use compost. I have mine under partial shade.

2. Shred or chop all vegetable material available, e.g. prunings, grass cuttings, kitchen vegetable waste, wood ash, etc., but avoid weeds with persistent root systems or that have gone to seed, or anything very obviously diseased.

3. Mix woody and green materials well and make sure everything is evenly damp (not soggy).

4. Mix in a handful or two of a high nitrogen fertiliser (or damp down with urine).

5. Fill your pit without compressing the material unduly, and cover with a plastic sheet or old carpet to keep in moisture. It will sink down as decomposition takes place. I find you can put more soft waste from the garden or kitchen on the top regularly, as it breaks down very quickly.

6. Leave for 2-6 months, checking from time to time that it is still damp enough – if not, water well again.

7. Sift the resultant compost to remove woody or undecomposed bits which can be put into the next compost pit or used for mulching. The compost should be evenly brown in colour and smell pleasantly ‘earthy’.

You may find compost worms active, though usually our conditions are too warm for them. More likely are a variety of beetle larvae which make a very good job of breaking down the material, but remove them before using the compost or they may eat the roots of your plants. A mass of woodlice indicates that the compost is too dry – wet it down again and they will go elsewhere. Powdery grey moulds may develop early on when there is a lot of woody material, but these will disappear as decomposition proceeds – again, keeping the material well moistened helps this.

Woodier material that has been well shredded can, of course, be used directly on the garden as a mulch and will slowly break down over a year or two. Do not dig in until breakdown is well advanced.

Likewise, green, soft material can be used for mulching but not where it will be in direct sun – put it under other mulching material or under low-growing plants.

*Jenny Bussey,
Alicante, Spain*

A LETTER FROM THE MGS PRESIDENT

Now that the Mediterranean Garden Society has completed the first 18 months of its existence I would like to say a few words on how it all started... In fact, more than anything else, the founding of the MGS makes me think of ‘The king asked the queen and the queen asked the dairymaid’. It all began in Australia. Trevor Nottle was writing a book there on gardens in hot climates and sought Derek Toms’ help. Derek published a letter in *The European* asking its readers to participate in this research by answering a questionnaire; Caroline Harbouri did so, met Derek and brought him to Sparoza – and the seed of the MGS was sown. Sparoza, now the property of the Goulandris Natural History Museum, seemed a good base for such a society. Derek thus wrote to Mrs. Niki Goulandris and received her blessing on the venture. In May 1994 Professor William Stearn came to supper at Sparoza. He gave his approval and important words of advice. And so it happened that the MGS came into being. A constitution was carefully drawn up and founder members approached, the legal costs involved in registering the society being defrayed by their subscriptions, and in January 1995 we were ready to enrol members.

And what about Sparoza itself? Sparoza is situated in east Attica. In the second half of the 1960s Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, retiring after a distinguished career in urban planning, decided to build a house and create a garden here. Her courage in attempting such a task single-handed is an inspiring example to all gardeners. The glorious views her well-chosen site afforded were the only plus factors. At that time no favourable feature existed to assist her: what is now the beautiful garden of Sparoza started from scratch on a stony hillside. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt’s apprehension of the interdependence of all aspects of the natural world make her a pioneer thinker, well ahead of her time. Her benign and challenging spirit would seem to be guiding our efforts, and one can’t but feel that she approves them.

But let me turn now to the business of the MGS. I am happy to report that due to all your efforts to enlist new members our

numbers have nearly doubled since 1996 began and now stand at about 425. Graziella Seferiades, our Vice-President, attended the Primavera alla Landriana in April; during her stay in Italy she enlisted more than a score of new members. Dana Zangas, our Treasurer, on a Christmas visit to her native Australia, was interviewed by Anne Latreille for *The Age*, whose interesting article resulted in a small flood of new Australian members. In Greece articles by Margarita Galati, Elizabeth Koubena and Angelica Trimmis also brought many new members.

Our debt to *The Garden*, *Pacific Horticulture* and *Gardens Illustrated* is enormous. Through their prestigious pages the MGS has become known worldwide.

This journal, *The Mediterranean Garden*, maintains its high standard in Caroline Harbourn's editorial hands with Derek Toms' beautiful, painstaking illustrations. The articles sent in by an increasing number of contributors make it imperative reading. Our good fortune in having Derek and Caroline with their skills and talents at the core of the Society from the outset is incredible!

In the autumn a newsletter will be published in both Greek and English for our Greek members. Barbara Diamantides has undertaken to edit this. The first issue will be sponsored by Horomides, the long-established nursery in Kifissia, so none of the Society's funds will be used for this local publication. It will contain news of topical interest as well as our programme of events in Greece. I mention it here in order to invite Greek members to contribute articles and notes and any suggestions they may have.

A list of members of the MGS will be made available towards the end of this year which will be supplied on application with a small charge to cover stationery and postage. Any member wishing not to be included in this list should let us know by the end of October.

If any members have ideas and suggestions about the Society, do please voice or pen them. Any society is its members, and closer involvement makes for vitality.

With my best wishes,
Sally Razelou



Sparoza - looking north along the upper terrace

THE CONTRIBUTORS

DUNCAN ACKERY is a retired physician now gardening in Menorca.

JENNY BUSSEY founded the Costa Blanca Gardeners' Circle in 1990. She is Chairwoman of their committee and edits their monthly newsletter.

RICHARD DIGHT is a soil scientist with interests in plant pests and diseases of the Mediterranean and garden history of the Mediterranean.

HEIDI GILDEMEISTER now gardens on a Balearic island. Her particular interest centres on the use of drought-tolerant plants; her book *Mediterranean Gardening: A Waterwise Approach* was published by Editorial Moll in 1995.

MARJORIE HOLMES created a garden on Corfu from scratch 20 years ago and writes on various garden matters.

GRACE KIERNAN, who lives and gardens not far from La Mortola, is the co-author with Maura Muratori of *Thomas Hanbury and His Garden* (1992).

HUGO LATYMER established the nursery Vivero Hortus on Mallorca in 1967. He is the author of *The Mediterranean Gardener* (1990).

JOANNA MILLAR, when not tending garden and guests, writes and lectures on the gardens of the Midi.

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

SALLY RAZELOU, President of the MGS, was an experienced gardener in Ireland before moving to Greece. Her interest in and knowledge of the Greek flora are of long standing.

HAMISH WARREN is a New Zealander who retired from teaching in England three years ago and now lives in Menorca.

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.

MARTIN WOOD is a garden consultant based in Yorkshire and London.

