



PERGOLA

Jasmine

Passion Flower

TERRACE

Euphorbia Mellifera

European Olive

PLANTING

PLANTING

POTS

Bamboo

Ceanothus

RAISED POND

PLANTING

POTS

Eucalyptus

GRAVEL

Eriobotrya Japonica

How to grow a Mediterranean garden

Our climate is becoming increasingly suitable for growing luscious plants formerly seen only in 'warm' countries. Take a fresh look at your outside space and bring a little light into your life

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EVEN POLITICIANS HAVE NOTICED THAT OUR GARDENS ARE BEGINNING TO CHANGE. The Environment Minister has gone so far as to make planting recommendations – he suggests we plant more marigolds and petunias. It is a popular opinion that our weather is on the turn and over the next few decades the average temperature is likely to rise, and this will lead to us having to rethink the way we garden. There are likely to be water shortages in some places, and many of the garden plants with which we have grown up may no longer be appropriate. Perhaps it's time to think of gardens more suited to a warmer climate; perhaps the sheltered courtyards that we see on holiday in southern Europe should become more prevalent in British gardens than our conventional lawns and herbaceous borders.

At this point, I feel that it's only fair to issue the following warnings. There are two important things to consider before creating a Mediterranean garden in this country. Firstly, never lose sight of the fact that we do not actually live in the Mediterranean. Occasionally – and this may come as a surprise to some – Britain is damp and dreary in a way that it never is on the Amalfi Coast or in St Tropez. Secondly, the design of your garden is, to a certain extent, governed by your nearest neighbours. If you live deep in the English countryside surrounded by grazing cattle and tall oaks, for instance, a Mediterranean garden will look as out of place as a haddock in a nightclub.

OK, you have been warned. The good news is that it's not necessary to slavishly recreate the Alhambra – just to cherry-pick the most suitable bits. The style is most suited to town gardens, so if we start with the redesign of a small urban garden, you can freely plunder the elements that best suit your own plot.

SHADY BUSINESS

There are three differences between a Mediterranean garden and a British one. Firstly, southern Europeans place a great emphasis on shade, whereas we spend an enormous amount of effort chasing the sun. Secondly, there's the ubiquity of soft green lawn in this country, whereas in hot climates, the lawn doesn't really feature, except on heavily irrigated golf courses where the grass is coarse and prickly. Thirdly, the range of plants that will thrive in the Med is more limited than the huge range that thrives in our temperate climate.

In our model garden, I've satisfied our first criterion by putting a shaded pergola over a paved area close to the house. Under this would be a table for convivial outdoor eating. The pergola would be covered with climbing plants to give shade – many of us have sat in the shade of restaurant terraces in southern Europe admiring the view and eating perfectly cooked food. But like many good ideas, it requires a little patience, as a balance must be struck between climbing plants that get up and over the structure as quickly as possible, and those that are so vigorous that shade quickly turns to ►

THE FIVE BEST ROSES FOR WARMER CLIMATES

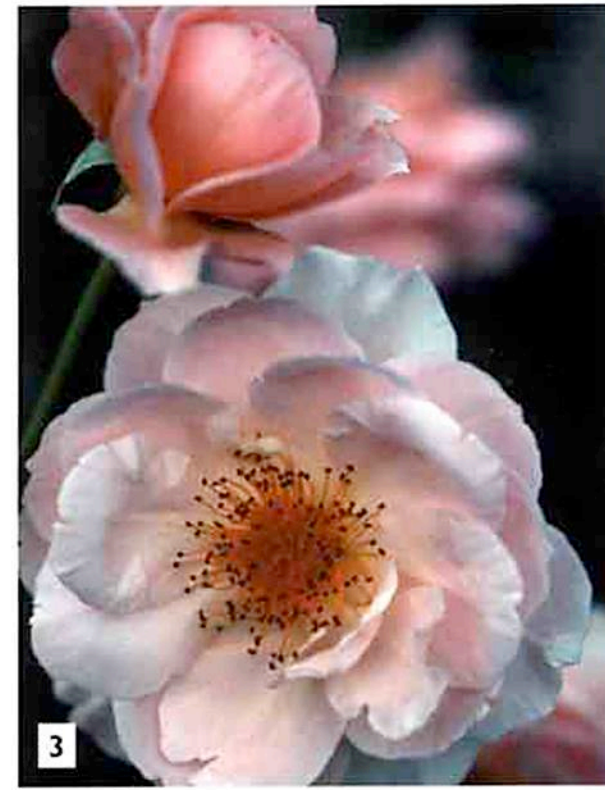
1 Rosa Ann Aberconway – floribunda with clusters of scented apricot flowers (grows up to 5ft).

2 Rosa Madame Alfred Carrière – climber with pinkish flowers that smell of lychees (grows up to 20ft).

3 Rosa Penelope – hybrid musk rose with trusses of shell-pink scented flowers (grows up to 6ft).

4 Rosa Banksiae Lutea – vigorous rambler with abundance of yellow flowers (grows up to 20ft).

5 Rosa Roseraie de l'Hay – Rugosa rose with claret-coloured flowers; makes an excellent hedge (grows up to 7ft).



darkness. It's best to use bamboo matting (widely available in most garden centres) fixed to the pergola to give the required shade for the first few years until the plants have a chance to mature.

When it comes to climbers, you can't go wrong with *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, which is an evergreen climber that gets to about 5m high and is covered with highly scented white flowers all summer. It's a plant that's already very popular in London, and will spread to more exposed parts of the country if the climate continues to get warmer. Teamed with that, you could try a grapevine – a perfectly hardy plant in this country, but one that very seldom bears edible fruit except under the cover of greenhouses. As temperatures rise, we may be able to grow more productive vines and English wine may become less of a Gallic joke. The passionflower is another excellent climber: currently gardeners in the south can grow *Passiflora caerulea*, which bears extraordinary-looking blue flowers, or *Passiflora incarnata*, which is shorter and pale violet in colour. Both varieties produce fruit that will ripen enough to be edible during hot summers.

On emerging from the pergola, a gravel path leads up to a small formal pond. This would have a simple fountain to provide the cooling sound of trickling water. The pond should be raised to about 40cm which, as well

as being safer for children than a ground-level pond, gives you somewhere to sit and louchely drag your fingers through the water.

There is no lawn. Consider for a moment the disadvantages of grass – it has to be mown with tedious regularity, it needs weeding, feeding, spiking and raking, and it goes an unpleasant shade of khaki when not watered in summer. However, I understand that people (especially children) need a grassed area for football and general rushing around, so it's impractical to advocate the wholesale uprooting of all lawns. Instead you need to think slightly differently. Yes, a lawn will suffer in the summer, but it's not going to die – within a few days of the first rain, it will be green and perky again. To water it is an unnecessary waste of time, effort and resources.

BORDER PATROL

All around are plants massed in large borders, as it's always best to sit as close as possible to one's plants in order to fully enjoy the scent, colour and shape without stirring too far from your glass of wine. One of the most comforting facts is that many of the plants we already grow are perfectly adaptable to a warmer climate. *Ceanothus*, ivies, *bergenias*, irises, daylilies and even such old familiar friends as roses and daffodils will thrive



THE FIVE BEST EXOTIC PLANTS

1 Aloe aristata – hardiest African aloe; a low-growing, fleshy leaved plant with lots of red flowers (grows flower spikes up to 12in).

2 Beschorneria yuccoides – yucca-like leaves, with very bright red spiked flowers in early summer (grows up to 2ft).

3 Eriobotrya japonica (the Loquat tree) – large-leaved evergreen tree (grows up to 12ft).

4 Hedychium coccineum tara (ginger lily) – with large leaves and marvellous orange flowers (grows up to 5ft).

5 Pittosporum tobira – a great evergreen filler with exquisitely scented cream flowers (grows up to 6ft).

in sunny conditions. But if you are going to all the trouble of changing the layout of your garden, you might as well use it as an excuse to go shopping and buy some new plants.

NATURAL SELECTION

When planting unusual and Mediterranean plants in your garden, consider the conditions in which they grow in the wild. For example, *Olea europaea* (the European olive) can be grown in a sheltered garden – in Italy and France, it can easily cope with the cold. But it grows on free-draining hillsides, so the worst thing for the poor tree is to sit with wet feet in soggy ground. The same is true of lavender and rosemary. If you have heavy clay soil, you may be better off choosing one of the eucalyptus family to get the benefit of silvery leaves and smooth, reptilian bark. Beneath the tree canopy, you can try some of the hardier palms like *Chamaerops humilis*. Mix them up with bamboos and softer-leaved shrubs such as *Euphorbia mellifera*, which has flowers that smell of honey; or large-leaved exotics, such as *Melianthus major* or *Tetrapanax papyrifera*.

While it's difficult to make blanket recommendations for garden plants as it depends so much on where you live, there are a few things that all of

us should do to maximise our contribution to the health of the world. Everybody should have a compost heap in order to recycle as much green waste as possible back into the ground. Mulching with compost or gravel will help to retain whatever moisture there is in the soil by slowing down evaporation. Save as much rainwater as possible in water butts. Finally – and this is the most difficult one for us gardeners – if a particular plant demands constant watering, don't be afraid to replace it with a more adaptable variety. With so many good plants available, there's no point in allowing poor and overly needy plants to occupy valuable garden space.

Climate change is probably inevitable, but we should do all in our power to slow it down. There may be times when we wish we had a Mediterranean climate, but it's our summer rain and lack of bone-chilling frost that makes British gardens the most varied in the world. Guard them with care and vigilance.

And never take planting advice from Cabinet Ministers. **S**
Need more inspiration? Turn to page 92 for a Greenbee ticket offer for BBC Gardeners' World Live.

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