



The Colonial and Plantation Garden

“Let every house be placed if the Person pleases in the middle of its plot so that there may be ground on each side for Gardens or Orchards, or fields, so that it may be a green Country Towne . . . and will always be wholesome.”

—William Penn

Colonial gardens are an important part of America’s cultural heritage, and one of its most delightful. Scattered about from New England throughout the South, they represent a particular time in our history. Whether authentic seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gardens, replicas, or simply newer interpretations of a basic style, they all share certain characteristics, with some variation. More formal than not (without being necessarily “grand”), they are ordered, geometric, and often symmetrical. Most are enclosed and intimate. Their organized structure reflects the needs and perspectives of a culture that prized order, balance, and economy.

The early settlers had a pragmatic approach to gardening, whether they were facing the harsh winters of Massachusetts, or the milder climate of Virginia. First, it was essential to enclose each household compound to keep out animals, wild or domestic. Within a fence or stone wall was a well-planned arrangement that emphasized function, rather than aesthetics, without compromising overall harmony and charm. The location of the house, its outbuildings and connecting “yards,” and planted areas were carefully sited for best drainage and exposure. Each had its specific purpose. Between the house and outbuildings was the “dooryard,” where animals were shorn, soap made, or wool dyed. This rustic spot was hardly a place for much greenery, except for a few shade trees (which were also useful as places to attach pulleys and lift heavy objects).

Each family maintained a basic garden and orchard to serve its needs. These formal plantings were often wedged in small areas between the house, yards, sheds, barns, meadows, and pastures. At first, necessity dictated planting vegetables and fruit shrubs and trees,

THOUGHTS ON GARDEN STYLES

rather than flowers. (During the eighteenth century, gardens became less utilitarian and often included decorative plants, as well as edibles.) Orchards contained large fruit trees, such as apples; but pears, peaches, apricots, and plums were arranged in borders or espaliers closer to the house. Herbs used for cooking were planted in simple, rectangular plots next to the house, or were sometimes mixed in with other plants. Physicians sometimes kept a “physic garden,” or botanic garden, to provide the proper curative herbs for their patients.

On large colonial southern plantations it was especially essential to create kitchen gardens and orchards, since they were often isolated from towns and villages. And given a more agreeable climate than that found in New England, plentiful varieties of English plants thrived there. According to Robert Beverly, who in 1705 wrote *History of the Present State of Virginia*, “A Kitchen-Garden don’t thrive better or faster in any part of the Universe than there. They have all the Culinary Plants that grow in England, and in far greater perfection, than in England.”

Most colonial gardens were arranged in neat, rectangular blocks bordered by boxwood (especially in the South) or other decorative plants. Separating these geometric, cultivated areas were brick or stone paths. The more elaborate gardens might also include a central azalea path aligned with the main door of the house and leading to a vista, stone bench, or statue. On either side of the walk were raised plots (for better drainage), usually arranged in symmetrical fashion. While vegetables and small fruits were kept in designated areas, ornamental plants surrounded the more important walkways. Sometimes edible plants and flowers were mixed in together, creating formal geometric designs.

In Virginia and other parts of the South, colonial—or plantation—gardens tended to be larger and more elaborate than in the North. With large-scale introduction of slavery into the southern colonies, manor houses were built, surrounded by often grand landscaped settings. The Virginia Tidewater plantations were particularly picturesque. Poised on rolling terrain high above rivers or canals, they enjoyed sweeping views over the surrounding landscape. While manor houses were usually set so as to command the best vistas, the gardens themselves were often located on descending terraces, in a theatrical arrangement reminiscent of Renaissance Italian and seventeenth-century English gardens. A large, enclosed, rectangular garden near the house featured vegetables and herbs planted in symmetrical

Los Angeles & Vicinity Gardens



The Arboretum Of Los Angeles County, Arcadia

A jewel among Southern California gardens, the Arboretum of Los Angeles County offers plant lovers a panoply of demonstration gardens, educational exhibits, and special events throughout the year. Operated jointly by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation and the California Arboretum Foundation, the lovely landscape covers 127 acres.

The arboretum is divided into sections arranged according to the geographic origins of species. A Tropical Forest, Redwood and Native Oak Groves, Australian, South American and African sections highlight rare and unusual flora from around the globe. Magnolias, ancient cycads, and acacias are represented in significant plant collections. The arboretum nurtures an assembly of such Australian native trees and shrubs as eucalyptus, leptospermum (commonly known as tea tree), and melaleuca. The considerable presence of these species reflects how well they thrive in the balmy Southern California climate.

The peaceful Baldwin Lake provides a protected refuge for wildlife, affording a pleasing environment for garden travelers. Surrounded by the silhouettes of lofty palms and the dense foliage of innumerable trees, the lake invites repose. Visitors can observe colorful peafowl, migrating ducks and many other birds that congregate here by the lake with the rabbits and turtles living in this sanctuary of the arboretum.

If visiting time is limited, set your sights upon the Meyberg Waterfall, one of the garden's most popular attractions. Locate Baldwin Lake and Circle Road on the visitor map, then proceed past Tule

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Pond, following Waterfall Walk into the North American/Asiatic Section. Head toward the Herb Garden, and from there just up the road to the right is the waterfall, situated on the arboretum's western border. The lovely views here are uplifting.

Both of historic appeal, the Hugo Reid Adobe and gingerbread-embellished Queen Anne Cottage are state and national landmarks, respectively. Native Gabrieleno-style Indian wickiups (a type of dwelling), and other restored structures like the Santa Anita Depot provide wonderful glimpses of the region's historical heritage. For history buffs, these buildings offer satisfying encounters with California's bygone days.

The arboretum also boasts the new Sunset Demonstration Gardens. The recently implemented 1½ acre design plan includes eight small gardens: the Water Retreat, the Nostalgia Garden, Gardening under the Oaks, and the Courtyard Garden, to name a few. You'll find them on the way to the Tropical Greenhouse at #30 on the visitor map. Other additional attractions at the arboretum include the Water Conservation Garden and the Tropical and Begonia greenhouses.

INFORMATION AND DIRECTIONS

The Arboretum of Los Angeles County, 301 N. Baldwin Avenue, Arcadia, CA 91007. Phone 626-821-3222 to confirm open hours and directions. Facilities include shuttle tram, reference library, cafe and gift shop. Phone 626-447-8751 for gift shop information. Open daily 9 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.; closed December 25. Admission fee. *Web site:* www.arboretum.org

Located approximately 45 minutes northeast of downtown Los Angeles, just east of Pasadena, and south of the Baldwin Avenue exit of the I-210 Freeway.

Charles F. Lummis Home—El Alisal, Los Angeles

The Historical Society of Southern California maintains its headquarters at the Charles Lummis Home, known also as El Alisal. Celebrated as a City of Los Angeles and State of California Historical Monument, and included on the National Register of Historic Places, El Alisal was once home to the unconventional, multitalented author, journalist, and founder of the Southwest Museum, Charles Lummis. The