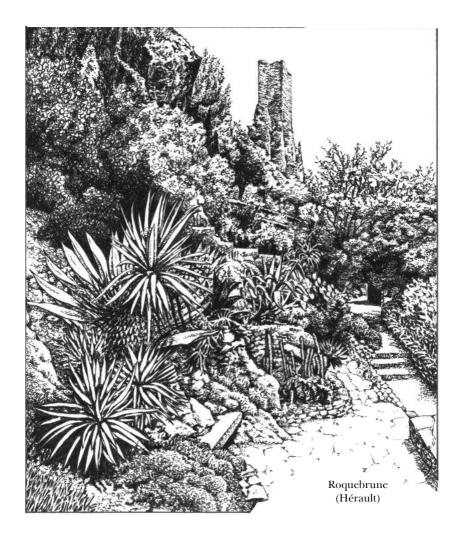
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THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN



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Editor Caroline Harbouri

Illustrations

C.R. Illingworth (p. 8), VW Architects (p. 11), Kathryn Williams (p. 26), Derek Toms

Translation Graziella Seferiades

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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. For details, please contact The Secretary, MGS, PO Box 14, Peania, 19002 Greece.

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

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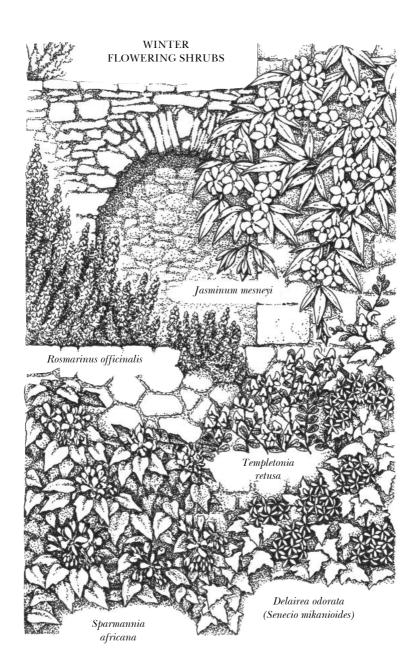
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MEDITORIAL

Sir John Chardin, travelling through Persia in the 1670s, was greatly impressed by the native flora but a trifle disappointed by the fabled gardens of that country. Indeed he found them lacking in what he considered (as an Englishman) to be evidence of the Art of Gardening. The reason for this, he concluded, was that "the Persians don't walk so much in Gardens as we do, but content themselves with a bare Prospect, and breathing the fresh Air; For this End, they set themselves down in some part of the Garden, at their first coming into it, and never move from their Seats till they are going out of it".*

Now if you are an expatriate English gardener in the Mediterranean it is possible that you have observed that while you spend much of your time in the garden walking around checking, dead-heading and pruning, spraying and mulching, weeding and forking, renewing ties, moving seedlings, and attempting to grow as wide a range of plants (all of which require individual attention) as space will permit, etc., etc., your Mediterranean neighbours are simply using the garden as an extension of the house. Sitting, sleeping, talking, cooking, eating, playing backgammon, watching television, supervising children and so on. (Except in the evening when, regardless of nationality, everybody is watering.) *Their* gardens are probably not as labour intensive as yours.

National stereotypes should not be taken too seriously. But if gardening can be considered as 'botany plus people' then people matter – especially when we come to try and define a 'Mediterranean' garden. It isn't sufficient just to list all the plants which thrive in this climate. In our last issue Judy MacDonald asked the question 'What is a Mediterranean Garden?' and, looking around Tuscany, found that changing lifestyles were having a profound effect on the kind of gardens which people are creating. In this issue two landscape architects discuss a new approach to garden design which

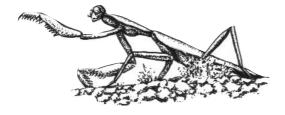
^{*} Quoted in *The Penguin Book of Garden Writing*, ed. David Wheeler, Viking 1996.

takes the traditional features of the local landscape as inspiration. In another article C.R.Illingworth, with a few deft brushstrokes, paints a vivid portrait of the local setting which influences her gardening life in south-west France. Hugo Latymer takes up Judy MacDonald's question and examines the physical factors which define our gardening environment. Nor should we omit Helene Pizzi's recent article on Rosemary from this discussion; a native plant which can be grown, looked at, cooked and eaten – all in the garden – could not be more characteristically Mediterranean.

For who wants to sit indoors when the sun is shining? With luck you might even barbecue your Christmas dinner on the terrace! But that same sunshine which gives us so many glorious days in autumn, winter and spring also precludes energetic gardening activity in summer (and since things are dormant then, there probably is little that needs doing). Summer is the season when hopefully your terrace, which was a sun-trap in December, is now a haven of green shade. Like Sir John's Persians, you may be quite content to sit and enjoy the "bare Prospect".

In the short life of this journal we have already looked at a number of Mediterranean gardens, differing considerably in scale and plan. What they all have in common is that they are not 'English' gardens. The English tradition of gardening inevitably exerts a strong influence on our thinking, whether we are an English expatriate in Spain or a Californian with English gardening books on the library shelves. But our distinctive climate and way of life call for gardens to match. Climate sets the limits on what we can and cannot do, but it is the way of life (i.e. people) which will give our gardens their final shape. We cannot afford to ignore the centuries of accumulated expertise of northern gardeners, but what is equally imperative in this dialogue is the true voice of the Mediterranean.

JARDIN MEDITERRANEEN AT ROQUEBRUNE (HERAULT)



Jenny Bussey

We saw a sign for the JARDIN MEDITERRANEEN at Roquebrune when visiting the Gorges d'Heric which cut into the Monts d'Espinouse in the Haut Languedoc area northwest of Béziers. Not to be confused with the village of Roquebrune on the Côte d'Azur between Monte Carlo and Nice with its famous gardens, this Hérault region of Roquebrune is built up the side of a steep rocky hill rising above the river Orb and topped by a tower built on a rusty brown rocky promontory.

The July sun was hot when we started the climb up from near the bridge over the Orb. The streets were narrow and, thankfully, often shady, and many houses were decorated with pot plants. We reached the church and arrows pointed on upwards until we reached the highest houses and the entrance.

Here we found the garden, still being developed by the Association CADE, on 4.3 hectares of land belonging to the village. Paths and steps have been laid and beds created to contain plants that thrive in a mediterranean climate. Although Roquebrune is some 40 kilometres from the Mediterranean coast and high in the mountains, it faces south and is well protected from cold northerly winds in winter, so it has a favourable microclimate for mediterranean plants.

Work started 10 years ago and the garden, which spreads along and up the steep hillside, is divided into three main sections. The area nearest the entrance has been planted with a selection of exotic plants from other countries, and there are collections of aloes, agaves, cacti and succulents which have established themselves well in the beds and in nooks and crannies in the rocks. Some plants were properly labelled, but most were not identified. These are complemented by flowering trees, shrubs and plants commonly planted in Mediterranean areas: bougainvilleas, albizias, acacias, oleanders, etc., which give colour and shade. A terrace has been arranged where refreshments are served and from which there is a lovely view over the surrounding countryside.

Beyond this is the botanical area devoted to representatives of local species of trees and shrubs, including many culinary and medicinal herbs, lavenders, genistas, cistuses and olives. Two fun creations lurk here among the plants on high terraces – a praying mantis and a giant grasshopper, both made of metal and realistically painted.

The Conservation Orchard is where local varieties of plants, particularly fruit trees, are being grown to preserve the genetic patrimony of the region.

As it was summer when we visited it, the garden was not looking at its best and the selection of plants did not contain many unusual varieties. I am sure that CADE would welcome seeds and cuttings of suitable plants to try out in their situation.

For further information write to Association CADE, Ruelle Chemin de Ronde, 34450 Roquebrune, or phone 67.89.55.29. Opening times vary depending on the season, Monday to Friday 08.00 to 12.00 and 13.30 to 17.30 being the norm with extended opening from May to August. Admission 15 FF. A few plants and other items are on sale to help raise funds.

GARDENING IN SOUTH-WEST FRANCE

C.R. Illingworth

Gardening on limestone schist with thin topsoil in a medieval hilltop village presents problems. But half the fun is coping with these, and when effort is rewarded triumph is sweet.

Our village, Brissac-le-Haut, is 6km south of the market town of Ganges, on the banks of the Hérault river. The medieval castle is visible from the D1 road; it is a private residence which is never open to the public and there are no facilities for visitors.

First of all we have WEATHER. The Mediterranean coast is 40km to the south, and behind us are the monumental Cévennes mountains and gorges. So we have high winds, droughts, floods, hail, frost, fog, thunderstorms. For the first time in living memory four inches of snow fell before lunch on Christmas Day two years ago; usually the snow arrives at the end of January, and sometimes stays on the mountaintops till May. But, as our wise old priest says, 'It is God's gift. It is full of nutrition for the soil, and He spreads it free'. At Christmastime last year we lunched in hot sun and shirtsleeves on the terrace, sunglasses and other glasses of *Clairette de Limoux*, a local sparkling white wine, at the ready.

Then we have pests too. Snails love our garden, but alas they are not edible. Wasps are passionate about the prolific fig tree so picking is dangerous, and jam-making, preserving and the like must be carried out behind closed doors and windows. Mosquitoes must be discouraged with liberal applications of insect repellent and a high intake of garlic, raw and cooked. Treat emergencies with the cut surface of a tomato or cucumber. Hornet stings can be dangerous and should be treated with antihistamine immediately. Scorpions sometimes appear in very hot weather, so it is wise to shake out boots and shoes before gardening activities get under way.

On the bright side there are the bees, who love the wild flowers and make honey from heather, sweet chestnuts, lavender and other herbs that grow locally. Crickets start to 'sing' when the temperature reaches 70° F and are reliable weather forecasters. Pretty little lizards enjoy sunbathing on the roof tiles and stone walls, making their characteristic chikchak noises.

Our terrace is 6×7m, paved with terracotta tiles, faces east, and catches the sun till four o'clock. A little iron staircase leads down to a garden of similar dimensions surrounded by high stone walls. The south wall is, in fact, part of a ruined silkworm nursery (magnagnerie) leading to an abandoned olive and apple grove. The cellar below the terrace makes an ideal dry store for firewood and gardening equipment (there is a standpipe on the terrace).

A large fig tree stands in a corner by the stairs and each summer bears a huge crop, which is made into pickles, *confits*, jams, and preserved in spirit (leave to chill for three hours before serving – and better still, soaked in the local Muscat wine made at Frontignan and Miréval, well cooled, with *crème fraiche*.

The raised herb bed at the foot of the steps is planted with thyme, sage, rosemary, tarragon and lavender. Parsley, basil (for tomatoes in all different ways), mint, chives and marigolds are planted in pots as they do not like the soil and can be moved about. Bay trees (*Laurus nobilis*) grow, self-seeded, among the ruins. Plumbago and periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) make a pretty mixture of blue-purple flowers from spring till autumn. After two attempts *Clematis armandii*, the evergreen one, is now establishing itself against the east wall. Various forms of hellebore put in an appearance throughout the year; I particularly like *Helleborus atrorubens* [now *H. dumetorum* subsp. *atrorubens*] with its plum-coloured flowers from early spring onwards, and *H. foetidus*, the stinking hellebore, which is reputed to repel mosquitoes. Honeysuckle, *Passiflora* and scented jasmine clamber over the walls.

Of course, the best way to discover what will grow is to walk in and study the countryside, following the sheep tracks and the detailed local maps for the remains of ancient Celtic and Roman settlements. There are many varieties of euphorbia (treat with care as their sap can cause an allergic reaction on skin). But the most beautiful sight is in autumn, when there are swathes of wild pink cyclamen. Sheep migrate in spring (*la transhumance*) from the *salins* (the salt marshes by the coast), a fine spectacle as the shepherds still wear the clothes that date from antiquity: long blue cloaks, black broad-brimmed hats, and the sheep red and blue pom-poms. The droppings left by the sheep as they pass by are much prized as manure.

The Romans are responsible for the wild garlic and the vines which are the major industry locally. The St-Saturnin wine is made close by in vineyards originally planted by Saturninus, a Roman general who colonised the area.

Containers, which surround all the village houses, are planted with arrays of pelargoniums, impatiens and culinary herbs. A clear rushing stream at the foot of the hill is the home of wild trout, dragonflies as big as helicopters, black-and-white swallowtail butterflies, water irises and fennel. Grill or bake the trout with the fennel. The *potagers* (allotments) by the bank make the most of the alluvial soil and produce fine marrows, squash, tomatoes, leeks, onions and salad plants. *Laitue sauvage*, a local wild lettuce, is particularly good, with its crisp and compact pink leaves.

There is a large Indian bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) in the village square, and one house is covered with bignonia [campsis] with its brilliant orange trumpets. Swallows and swifts fly overhead and at dusk the bats come out to play. Sometimes we hear a nightjar. Buzzards hover and swoop over the mountains.

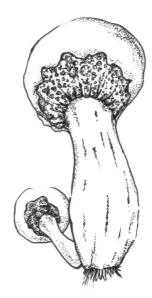
When the autumn rains come, wild mushrooms spring up overnight. We take them to the local pharmacist for identification. He has a large notice in his window which says:

ATTENTION! FUNGI!

He sorts out the delicious from their poisonous look-alikes. One particularly lethal mushroom closely resembles the cep and kills within minutes if eaten in conjunction with any sort of alcohol; it is rumoured locally to be the deceived wife's friend as the poison cannot be detected in the corpse of the adulterer.

The first frosts of autumn mean that the sloes that grow in the wild profusely are ready for harvesting to make supplies of that singularly British concoction, sloe gin. Freeze the berries





Chanterelle (Cantharellus cibarius)

Ceps (Boletus edulis)

Drawings by C.R. Illingworth

overnight; to each kilo of fruit add a litre of gin and 250g white sugar. Use bottles with screw tops, store upright in a dark place and turn the bottles round from time to time. After three months it is ready to drink, but with restraint keeps indefinitely.

Because of the altitude (over 1000 metres above sea level) we have log fires all the year round; olive, apple and oak logs burn brightly, and the cold ashes scattered on the garden enrich the soil. They also repel the snails.

So, at the end of the day, what could be better than sitting at the fireside, eating wild mushroom omelettes or risotto made with the wild red rice grown locally in the Camargue, toasted *Bleu de montaigne* or Roquefort ewes' cheese, raising our glasses to the blessed St Saturnin, and, after the figs, a nightcap of home-made sloe gin?

A MALLORCAN GARDEN: ANOTHER APPROACH TO MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN DESIGN

Craig P. Verzone & Cristina Woods

The contemporary Mediterranean garden may refer for inspiration and form to the laboured and carefully constructed landscape that arises from millennia of cultivation. The site in question was a small plot of land on the island of Mallorca, a 'garden room' closely bound by three walls and a house and broadly contained by the distant mountains, an expanse of plain and a hilltop castle, whose owners wished to construct a garden connected to the Mallorcan land. This land suffers through the long, hot summer and flourishes during a second spring. Underfoot the earth is hard, sun-weathered and crowded with stone. Rocks have been dug up and set aside to make room for the growth of productive species: olive, almond, fig, date, lemon and orange. Orchards have been woven across the outcropped lands. Fields are annually planted with fruits and vegetables. In spite of the conditions, the soil has been worked into production; as a result, the landscape hardly resembles that which it once was.

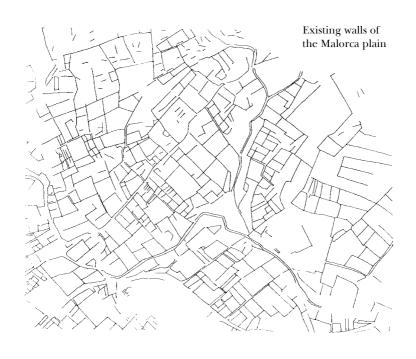
Surrounding traces on neighbouring expanses of land provide natural and cultural insight into past generations and suggest a form for the new garden. Through a process of mapping, aspects were isolated to be studied alone as well as in comparison with others: topography, roadways, buildings, stone walls, waterways and vegetation. Subsequent analysis revealed hidden relationships between habitation, climate and agriculture. On this plain in Mallorca, primary human circulation is inversely related to surface drainage, building orientation appears to be canted away from the predominant winds, and field patterns lie irregularly along the lines of topography and drainage.

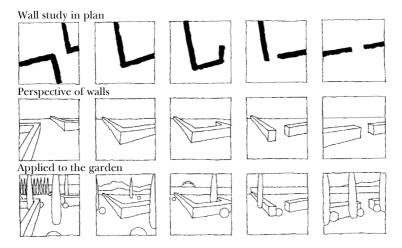
A closer study – most compelling and revealing – shed light upon the vast and complex system of stone walls and land division. The network of walls appears to synthesise both the natural and cultural aspects of this landscape. Between the walls, one can readily visualise the roadways and waterways; moreover, topography and drainage patterns are revealed by their layout. Within them are sited buildings, along their bounds lie property demarcation lines, enclosed by them orchards and fields are planted or sown. Once these relationships have been appreciated, they can be incorporated into the new garden.

Throughout centuries of working the land, farmers hopeful of a harvest have carefully placed the stones where they lie today. Indeed, the walls of Mallorca order the land and are integral to the experience of those who make their home here or who chance a visit. These walls symbolise circulation, boundary and threshold. They retain, divide, orient, screen and shade. They follow property lines and topographical changes. Although they stand straight, upright, sometimes battered, they rarely lie square to one another upon the land. They generally follow the two orthogonal characteristics of the land – contour and slope – yet the common deviations from these reflect local circumstance. What results is a pattern or network of near but never true perpendicular planimetric geometries.

The walls have long stretches and short, insides and outsides. Some imply passage, while others imply entrance. They signify protection to animals, the smallest of which find haven within and the larger of which travel along them or on top of them. Many walls divide and contain. Some have short tails which wrap round to contain small parcels of land. Often, stretches of walls lie strictly parallel to one another of equal length and spacing, implying segmentation and categorisation. Occasionally some seem to float, oddly stranded within a larger space, a field or a wood. The meaning and origin of many remain unknown.

However different they are, it is obvious that the orientations of one wall to another create multitudinous spatial experiences which may provide a foundation for the layout of the new Mallorcan garden.





An Approach to Design

VW Architects

Within the garden, walls in the form of decorative hedges define passages and rooms. They direct and contain, enclose. Some provide shade for smaller herbaceous plants, while others starkly line the bare path edge. The rich foliage differs in tone, texture and colour. Each passage leads to a room where another passage is discovered. Rooms and passages overlap: throughout, along the paths lie mystery and surprise. No vantage point or perspective divulges the whole; instead, each point is unveiled singly, only to disappear. The sum is nothing less than a mental construction.

Thus, although the garden is small, one's experience of it is diverse and lingering. Once the concept and structure of the vegetative hedges are in place, a few additional elements are added to illuminate moments within the garden's outer bounds: a vertical field of cypress lines, bands of herbaceous colour and points of solid spheres.

Cypress trees mark the interstices. Between passages and rooms they reach far above the horizon and distant mountains. In contrast to the long horizontal masses, narrow passages and open rooms, they point to the cloudbanks above. Collectively, the cypresses define a field: they too create a framework for the elements within.

Standing in front of the dark backdrop of hedges, native and exotic plants bring bright, seasonal hues to the rooms and passages. Thin slivers and wide borders hug the green walls. Underfoot – reminiscent of the mythical sling throwers of Mallorca's past – a field of small stones rests.

Along the passages and inside the rooms sit large curious spheres. They imply habitation of a different sort. Punctuating the ground-plane, they balance the weight of the thick hedge lines and the apparently random cypress field.

Above all, the vegetative hedges, embedded as the garden's skeleton, orient, direct, screen and shade. They contain and frame to create a diversity of spatial experience. Derived as they are from the walls which order the land on Mallorca, they encourage us to understand another approach to Mediterranean garden design.

HIDDEN GOLD AND MISSING SILVER

Tom Wellsted

Two excellent shrubs: one not too well known, *Heimia salicifolia*, with its hidden gold, the other very well known, yet often curiously described, the Tree or Shrubby Germander, *Teucrium fruticans*, of the missing silver.



Heimia salicifolia

The willow-leaved (I take *salicifolia* with a pinch of salt) *Heimia* is a charming, neat, rounded shrub. Its spiky leaves would better be described as "*callistemonifolia*", but what a mouthful that would be. They really are rather like those of many bottlebrushes, whereas I have never seen a willow with leaves as fine as these. Medium green in maturity from light green, bronze and copper colours in emerging youth, stemless except to botanists. Evergreen too with me in the sense that the shrubs never lose all their leaves, but deciduous in all the descriptions I have read about this plant. The leaves densely clothe the stems and from their axils appear the virtually stemless flowers. They are yellow, of crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia*) form which may not be so surprising since they are of the same

loosestrife family (Lythraceae) but somewhat smaller in diameter at, with my plants, about 1 - 1.5 cm. Curiously, and again in bottlebrush fashion, the seed pods persist but as individuals in their axils, rounded brown balls. Reputedly this shrub will grow to 3m or so; however, after five years mine are hardly 1m tall but about as much across. Not flamboyant but a quiet delight of a plant; reputedly tender, of Central and South American origin, yet so far surviving with me. My plants were easily raised from seed kindly sent to me by the excellent RHS surplus seed distribution service.



Now for the metallic contrast of missing silver, for here is a plant of a very different character. Indeed, so different are the descriptions of this plant compared to what my eyes, and other eyes than mine, have seen that I can only conclude that there are different clones in existence, unreported, or that the plant is hallucinogenic - and from a distance too!

Left to grow on its own, the Tree Germander is reputedly a rather straggly shrub but as a clipped plant, and as I know it a supreme hedger, it is impenetrably dense. A sheet of silver set with amethysts from winter into late spring. Heavens, can you ask for more? Yet it is little grown here where it thrives at about 200m; a few kilometres north at about 400m I have been told it

is difficult to overwinter outside in the Lubéron region. The leaves are of about the same size as those of common box, maybe a bit longer and a bit more pointed; they densely cover clipped plants and with their short supporting twigs, silver too, are virtually unseethroughable (how's that for a word?). The flowers are rather similar to those of rosemary in colour and colour variation, but a bit larger, longer and with in effect a bigger pointed lip.

It is not always easy to describe plants clearly: my own faults in this respect are unfortunately only too clear to me. The Tree Germander is well known and has been cultivated for a very long time; it originates from the Iberian and western regions of the Mediterranean lands. It is astonishing therefore to find such widely differing descriptions of its leaf colours: indeed, I'd venture to suggest that it is impossible to identify this plant from some. As far as I am concerned the leaves are silver, all over, front, back and sides, veins and stems included. They are totally silver when young but do age greyer and greener. They are not '...dark, rather bright green and glabrous above, white, with a close felt beneath, fragrant when crushed...' as per Bean, 8th edition, 1980; they are not '...dark, shining green above, densely white felted beneath...' as per Polunin in Flowers of Europe, Oxford, 1969, an odd description belied by the photographic illustration in the same book; they are not '...dark green, shiny... white felted beneath...' as per Davies and Gibbons in Wild Flowers of Southern Europe, 1993, though this latter is supported by a terrible and very green photo, at least to some extent. One wonders where these three rather similar descriptions originated. The RHS Encyclopaedia of Plants and Flowers, 1989, is much better, giving '...grey-green leaves with white undersides...' and this may well apply in cool climes I suppose? Finally, may I recommend that you read *The* Mediterranean Garden, No. 4, p. 26, item 5: thank you, Judith MacDonald!

HELIANTHEMUM



This genus of small, procumbent subshrubs – sometimes called the Sun Roses – is closely allied to that group of plants referred to as the Rock Roses (*Cistus and Halimium*). Almost invariably they have a wiry, woody stem system with small ovate leaves and brilliantly coloured flowers in a wide variety of colours. The considerable range of modern cultivars arises from a long history of hybridisation using several species. They are mostly natives of southern Europe and succeed most satisfactorily in a mediterranean climate, although their more northerly and higher distribution than the Rock Roses makes them significantly more tolerant of frost.

Modern hybrids have brilliantly coloured flowers, from vibrant reds and pinks through orange, copper, apricot and vellow to white; this is in combination with foliage colours ranging from a dark lustrous green to silvery grey. Their value in the garden is both as groundcover and as a plant suitable for the provision of an informal edge to taller plantings. Most of these modern hybrids have been selected in the United Kingdom and Northern Europe on the basis of flower and foliage colours, and scant attention has been paid to their habit of growth, with the consequence that many are rangy and open in their habit, the foliage being carried too sparsely on the wiry stem. This produces an insufficiently close growth habit for effective groundcover and in a mediterranean climate, especially where irrigation is practised, weed growth is unlikely to be suppressed. It is therefore important to select cultivars with a dense, close habit of growth.

Reference to nurserymen's catalogues will reveal a multiplicity of names and those cited here represent only the

tip of the iceberg but have been selected on the basis of combining good quality in terms of flower and foliage colours and a dense, compact, either spreading or mounding habit.

The Sun Roses will prosper in the high light intensity and arid atmospheric and climatic conditions of a mediterranean situation but require a well drained soil and sunny position in order to encourage their floriferous habit.

The range and variety of cultivars is legion, with variations in flower size and colour (with or without a blotch), single or double flowers, leaf colour and size, vigour, ultimate plant size and habit. Once established the plants flower profusely – being covered every day in a fresh crop of flowers. These only last for that day but are continuously produced through a season that lasts from May well into June and then at a lower intensity into late summer – this being a function of the level of irrigation applied.

'St. John's College Yellow' is a compact, densely branching, prostrate, spreading mat-forming variety with medium sized blueish grey leaves. The flowers are relatively small (2cm+) but dainty and a clear yellow with a small orange eye and yellow anthers; they are borne on erect stems 10cm tall above the 5cm tall thick mat of foliage. This variety is an ornamental as well as a competent weed-smothering groundcover. It is a vigorously growing subject and will quickly cover 50cm by 50cm.

'Ben Fhada' is a densely branched, procumbent, compact variety which mounds rather than spreads. It has small (1cm), narrow, lustrous green leaves. The flowers are substantial, a clear, bright yellow emphasised by an orange eye; these contrast well with the foliage. It is sufficiently dense to be a competent and suppressant groundcover, but as it is mounding rather than spreading should be planted at 30cm by 30cm.

'Snow Queen' is an openly, sparse growing variety but which produces a sufficient branching habit to develop a mat of stems which will give an adequate groundcover. The habit is semiprostrate and the very grey leaves provide a good contrast to the large (3cm) white flowers with their central boss of yellow stamens. Plant at 50cm by 50cm.

'Ben More' is a dense, compact variety with excellent weed suppressant qualities; it has dark green leaves and bright orange flowers. It has a flat, adpressed appearance in growth and will best be spaced at 30cm by 30cm.

'Wisley Primrose' is a compact, vigorous and spreading, old established variety. It has bright primrose yellow flowers on large, grey green leaves. It can be planted at 40cm by 40cm.

'The Bride' is a low growing, compact plant with short, stubby, grey leaves and white flowers which have a yellow blotch at the base of each petal. It should be planted at 40cm by 40cm.

'Ben Ledi' is another flat growing variety with a full habit; it has dark green leaves and rose pink flowers.

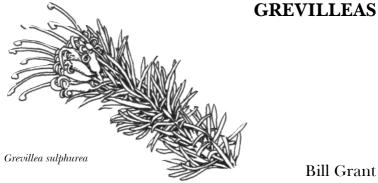
'Fire Dragon' is a mounding variety with grey green foliage and bright orange-scarlet flowers.

The species, although often dainty in habit and colour, are rarely sufficiently dense or vigorous enough in their growth to make good groundcover and suppress weed growth.

The Sun Roses have a long flowering season, are easy to establish and grow, are hardy and provide excellent 'value for money'. The chief criterion for a 'good' variety will be its ability to suppress weed growth. Good effects can be obtained over large areas by planting a collection of varieties in groups so that a patchwork quilt effect is achieved. This can be enhanced still further, by those of an artistic inclination, if the pattern is colour-coordinated in terms of both flower and foliage colours.

These plants require little maintenance and will thrive on poor, rocky and limestone soils – drainage is the only essential feature. They will benefit from shearing over during the winter and pruning to remove old stems at less frequent intervals.

GREVILLEAS



Now that there is a printed (and CD-ROM!) list of nurseries in Europe, those of you who may want to grow Australian plants, especially grevilleas, can find sources for purchasing them.

PPP Index Pflanzen, Plantes, Plants, compiled by Anne and Walter Erhardt - nearly 600 pages of plants, nurseries, an index of horticultural societies, dialing codes, information on the CD-ROM as well as a section of advertising - makes it possible as never before to locate nurseries that sell them.

The thick paperback is printed in three languages: German, French and English. For information about purchasing the volume, write to Anne & Walter Erhardt, Langenstadt 64, D-95512 Neudrossenfeld, Germany (Fax: 49-9228-8312).

Now, back to my grevilleas. For the past fifteen years I have been growing more than sixty Grevillea species and hybrids. My garden is near the coast about 85 miles south of San Francisco on Monterey Bay. The summers are long, hot and dry. The winters are mild though there can be frosts and five years ago there was a killing frost that set records. (I lost only one grevillea.) Normally the rainfall is between 11 and 20 inches, through we have just passed through a seven-year drought.

My soil is a mixture of sand and red clay, depending on what part of the garden I am talking about. For over 100 years the property was crowded with Monterey pines and invading eucalyptus. I cleared most of the latter when I built my own house. Had I known the soil would be so hostile, I should probably never have tried to make a garden.

There is a deer problem that I have solved with a fence. The gophers that live beneath the soil are my worst enemies because they love roses above all plants, and I have over 400 of them. So I must create wire baskets to line the holes before I plant anything. Recently I lost four prize roses because the gophers were able to climb over the protection and gnaw away at the roots. We have the usual garden pests and diseases, but I do not spray with any chemicals and use only organic fertilisers. I believe there are enough good insects to create a balance in the garden – and I am happy with the general health of all my plants.

Why have I mentioned these problems before continuing with the grevilleas? For a good reason. Deer, gophers and other pests do not like this rugged Australian native. So I don't need to provide any protection for them. And, once established, they can be left to themselves as they are the most drought-tolerant plants I have. I have *never* fertilised them, and to only a few do I ever give water. (Indeed, summer water is sure to kill most of them unless it is the odd raindrop.) Pruning once a year is the most work I need to keep them healthy, but they do need to be pruned.

They are magnets for the nectar birds, in our case the hummingbirds that reside here and those that pass by each spring. Some bloom all year, and I find it hard to prune when so many birds depend on them for their regular diet, so I stagger the trimming. As cut flowers they do not last long in the vase, the colour slipping away after a day or so. But as garden ornamentals there is no hardier plant in my garden, unless it is the rose species that I grow.

The European Plant Finder I mentioned above lists eight grevilleas, six of which are species. In my experience the alpina forms are smaller and are perfect for the rock garden or sunny areas that get little water. Grevillea banksii in my garden is still a young shrub. It has bright red, spider-like blossoms and long, thin foliage. It is supposed to grow to three metres, but I plan to shape it so that there is room around it for more plants. This is the form most common in nurseries, so I am not sure which

form is offered by the German nursery. There are prostrate as well as colour variant forms.

Grevillea juniperina comes in a number of forms and it is often confused with others. The list is a bit confusing as no colour is mentioned except in the form G. sulphurea [now G. juniperina subsp. sulphurea], which I grow in partial shade with success. The many forms of this species are all hardy and long-blooming. One of its hybrids is also mentioned in the list, 'Canberra Gem', which is widely available in California nurseries. It can tolerate complete shade; the deep red flowers cover the bush.

G. robusta is a strong, enduring tree that can reach 40 metres! It is found only along highways in California as its toxic qualities make it a dangerous plant in the garden unless handled with care. The skin eruptions for those affected are quite painful. However, it can be a beautiful addition to the wild garden.

G. rosmarinifolia is an extremely variable species; I have five forms in my garden. So it is hard to say what is offered by the European nurseries. Needless to say, in all its forms it is hardy, beautiful, a strong bird-attracter.

G.×*semperflorens* is the remaining item; I can find nothing in the literature to help for a description. Since nearly all grevilleas are nearly ever-blooming, it could be almost any plant.

Finally, for those determined to explore the genus in detail, let me recommend one of the greatest botanical publications of this century. The three-volume definitive work was published recently in Australia, and it is available in the U.S. and Europe: *The Grevillea Book* by Peter Olde and Neil Marriott. Beautifully printed with colour photographs of nearly every grevillea known to man, I doubt there is another work that so completely covers the history, taxonomy and cultivation of plants worthy of our mediterranean gardens.

(Note: In the March 1995 publication of the Grevillea Study Group, there is an interesting short history of the cultivation of grevilleas in England. This would indicate that there are more plants available than are listed in the new book. I saw grevilleas along the French Riviera last summer that are not in the book either.)

PAULOWNIAS



Duncan Ackery

In the past I knew of only one paulownia tree in Menorca. It was pointed out to me by a friend some years ago growing beside the main road which bisects the island. Apparently there was a line of them alongside the main road at one time and this tree is the sole survivor; and even it is at risk from any further road-widening scheme. Standing as it does with the traffic closely rushing by, one might consider that an 'r' ought perhaps to be added, changing its name from Paulownia tomentosa to "P. tormentosa"! Each spring it is crowned by a mass of pale lilac trumpet flowers. In the autumn these are replaced by pods which contain many seeds. In 1992 I stopped the car and collected a few pods. I potted up the seeds and was surprised at the speed and completeness of the germination. The small plants turned to dry sticks that winter and, in my ignorance, I assumed they had died and nearly threw them out. Fortunately this task was overlooked, for in the spring leaves developed and growth progressed rapidly. This has continued at a phenomenal rate so that after four years I have trees that are more than five metres tall with trunks over fifty centimetres in girth. This autumn the buds are plentiful for the first time, ready for next spring's inflorescence. I was surprised too to see a few flowers fully out in late September and October. In northern climates the early spring flowering can be a disadvantage, for although paulownias are hardy the

flowers are readily damaged by a late frost. The spring shoots of soft, downy foliage grow into large leaves, giving a pleasant effect through the summer months. These do not seem much troubled by the strong salty winds of Menorca, but by autumn the appearance is less attractive until the leaves are finally lost in November. The trees can be pruned easily as the wood is soft, as to be expected with the rapid growth. It is said that drastic pruning results in even larger leaf size the following year, but I have not tried this. For the Mediterranean gardener paulownias have a lot to offer: rapid growth, beautiful flowers (possibly in autumn as well as spring), attractive foliage and an appearance which blends well amongst its non-deciduous neighbours, such as pine, holm oak and olive. They seem to like the alkaline conditions found in this part of Menorca and should be planted in a position which allows room for their ambitious growth and where leaf-fall is not a problem; for instance not on the windward side of a bathing pool. Once established their water requirement is small. They could be of particular advantage in sites where both summer shade and winter sunshine are wanted. The genus is included nowadays in the Scrophulariaceae but is also closely related to the Bignonia family. Anna Paulovna, daughter of an early nineteenth century Czar of Russia, gave her name to them. I assume my trees are *P. tomentosa* but they could be *P. lilacina* [now considered a synonym of *P. tomentosa*] - the two seem very similar.

THE DRAGON PLANT

Kathryn Williams

In early August at Kew Gardens, a three-metre specimen of *Amorphophallus titanum* flowered for the first time in 33 years. The plant, commonly called the titan arum, is known in its native Sumatra as the corpse plant on account of the smell of putrefying flesh given off by its flower.

When we acquired our overgrown garden in northern Provence we were 'lucky' enough to inherit what must be a near relative of this plant. Although obviously an arum, we did not know what variety it was, nor did we at first believe that the atrocious smell could really be from the plant; surely something must have died in its vicinity, we thought. We referred to it as the Monster and took photographs of it towering over us. A visit to the botanical garden planted by J.H. Fabre in Serignan identified the plant as *Arum dracunculus* [now *Dracunculus vulgaris*].

Each spring the plant throws up sturdy green and white blotched stems carrying strangely recurved leaves with white horizontal markings. In May it adds velvety purple-brown spathes with crinkled edges, each enclosing a shiny black spadix. These reach a height of two metres – a convenient height for sniffing them, were it necessary to get that close. It isn't! This plant shares with its Sumatran cousin the alluring smell of rotting flesh to attract pollinating blowflies. By summer the plant has died back and disappeared from view.

Seedlings appear readily in newly-turned soil, but have not transplanted successfully so far. Many may ask why we have tried.

Friends in England, when told of this marvel, ask why we don't get rid of it, and if it was beside the kitchen door the thought would doubtless cross my mind too. Tucked away in a far downwind corner of the garden as it is, however, the smell is a small price to pay for the fascination of this bizarre and strangely beautiful plant.

Incidentally, I can recommend to anyone living in Provence a visit to the garden in Serignan. Known as L'Harmas de J.H. Fabre, it is eight km north-east of Orange and is an excellent means of identifying plants which will grow in the area. The planting is informal in a semi-wooded environment, encouraging aimless wandering and exploration, but most plants are labelled so a notebook is essential.



Arum dracunculus

Drawing by Kathryn Williams



MOLES: A SCOURGE OF THE GARDEN?

Piero Caneti

This article is directed towards all members of the MGS who, like Richard Oxby (Letters, *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 6), live in the Old World and who have struggled and continue to do so against a particularly persistent mammal which causes trouble in the garden: the mole. I too would indeed be very interested to know of others' experiences and whether they have found efficient methods of keeping this small and harmful animal at bay. I shall list here all the expedients to which we have had recourse, though without obtaining any appreciable results.

Let's see first of all why moles are not loved by gardeners, even by those who are sensitive to the natural equilibrium of the environment. After all, since they are rigorously carnivorous, moles contribute to the elimination of highly undesirable larvae and insects; we could mention among these Coleoptera of all kinds, mole crickets, snapping beetles and Dipterans. On the other hand moles hunt any shrews, voles, lizards, blindworms and water snakes which happen to stray into their tunnels. At night they come out on to the surface looking for snails and frogs and they even devour the fledglings of ground-nesting birds.

The mole is without doubt a scavenger of unarguable usefulness. However, its habits make it extremely worrying in

the garden. It digs underground tunnels in search of food and is tremendously voracious, needing to eat a quantity of food equivalent to its own weight every day. When food is abundant it will even eat twice or three times its own weight. If one considers that it is very greedy for earthworms and that the speed with which it can move underground is equal to that of a slow pedestrian, one can imagine the effect its presence has in a substrate that has recently been cultivated and enriched with organic substances. In no time this substrate comes to resemble Gruyère. The mole has such a sensitive sense of smell that it can detect an earthworm on the other side of a 6cmthick wall; it will therefore go round and under every newly planted plant until it finds even just one of its favourite morsels. This network of tunnels disturbs the contact of roots with the soil, as well as becoming a hunting ground for rodents who use these tunnels in order to reach the succulent Hemerocallis bulbs or the much sought-after fleshy roots of artichokes. The air pockets created in the substrate can lead to the death of young plants or can cause whole branches or parts of established plants to dry up. Their anchorage in the soil becomes precarious since rain water penetrating into these tunnels forms holes and channels which in some cases destabilise the plant. Lawns scarred by molehills are nothing in comparison to what is going on underground.

No system used so far has had any effect on the habits of this animal. The most they achieve is to induce the mole to abandon one tunnel and construct another nearby. Not even the most drastic measures have had any success; metal or wooden traps are systematically avoided by moles, while the same can be said about various poisons which have the added disadvantage of ending up by merely being a danger for domestic animals. Some people maintain that cats can catch moles and claim to have seen this with their own eyes. I can't disprove them but believe that this phenomenon is very rare – although no doubt lucky for the proud possessors of such skilled felines.

Let me list some of the many inefficient measures that have been used against moles (the materials and substances mentioned are inserted into the moles' tunnels): rags soaked in gasoline, smoked herring heads, elder leaves steeped in water, garlic either fresh or steeped, methane gas, sulphur dioxide produced from special sulphur cartridges, plastic cones soaked in some foul-smelling solution, acetylene gas produced by the contact of calcium carbide with water, crystals of *Incarvillea delavayi*, plastic bottles without a bottom inserted vertically into the tunnel, a mixture obtained by putting in the blender castor oil and liquid detergent, flooding the tunnels, a repellent substance called Tourteau, placing a radio crackling with static, turned up to full volume, at the entrance to the tunnel, or placing a tuning fork which, in spite of being costly and guaranteed for five years, loses its efficacy very rapidly so that a mole will cheerfully pass within a metre of where it is installed.

Perhaps we should conclude that living with moles is inevitable – maybe we should even be glad of their presence as an indication that the soil is healthy and rich in organic matter and thus favourable to every biological process. But we are left with the sadness of seeing young plants die and all our work wasted. It is true of course that this is all part of having a garden. Indeed, anyone who has ever been proud of the results achieved knows full well the effort involved. Nevertheless, I cannot help reiterating the hope expressed at the beginning of this article: does anyone know of a way of getting rid of moles?

THE MEDITERRANEAN CLIMBING CUTWORM

(Spodoptera littoralis)

Richard Dight

This pest can occur throughout the Mediterranean area and although it is not frequently seen in gardens, when it comes you will know it!

Spodoptera littoralis is a rather undistinguished moth with dark brownish forewings and whitish underwings that lays eggs in groups of 100 to 300 (one female may lay as many as 2000 eggs), on host plants or on the ground.

Caterpillars emerge which are pink when small but as they grow change to brownish green with yellow lateral lines and black spots. They are voracious feeders, eating almost any green plants. When they have eaten bare the area around where they hatched they move on in hundreds, marching and eating as they go, hence their other name – armyworms. It is thought that they were one of the Biblical plagues of Egypt.

I have twice seen lawns eaten bare in two days and the caterpillars climbing the walls of the house and in through the windows looking for more food. The vast number of caterpillars are preyed upon by wasps which pick up and carry off the caterpillars in their legs to their nests.

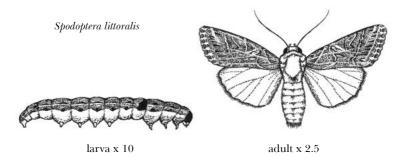
The worst cases were in gardens that were well lit with the lights left on at night, which must have attracted many moths.

There are many species of *Spodoptera* (Noctuid moths), mainly inhabitants of the tropics and sub-tropics, which are recorded as pests of over 80 crop plants. *Spodoptera exigua* (the beet armyworm) also occurs in the Mediterranean area.

If your garden is unfortunately attacked by this pest there will be more than can be hand-picked off the plants. For those that are environmentally conscious, *Bacillus thuringiensis* could be used, but this takes two to four days to kill the caterpillars by which time considerable damage will be done. The alternative is any chemical insecticide approved for use on

caterpillars; these are generally available for use in small garden packs. A thorough spraying of the area will cure the problem.

Lawns that have been eaten bare will recover quickly if given a dressing of general fertiliser (10 g/m²) followed by irrigation.



Plants, like people, get sick from time to time however healthy their nutrition and environment. The problem is how much one should do about it. People generally go to the doctor and hope that he'll give them something to make them better. I believe sick plants need help too.

The first thing to do is to make the correct diagnosis, which I hope my little pieces will help members to do. Plants in Mediterranean gardens can suffer from a range of pests and diseases unknown in northern European gardens (as well as many that are the same), and it is those with which members may be unfamiliar that I describe, because without a correct diagnosis one cannot decide on treatment.

In many instances, especially in ornamental flowers and shrubs, treatment may not be necessary: the plant and the gardener can live with the problem. Vegetables and fruit are another matter because we grow them to eat, and a treated crop may be better than a lost or inedible one. If I suggest a chemical treatment it will have been approved for use in the UK or Spain and will be the most efficient there is available. It is up to members to decide if they want to use it, after reading the label instructions.

What I am entirely against is the use of a chemical – or, worse still, a cocktail of chemicals – regularly in the hope of keeping nasties at bay.

Plant pests and diseases have always been with us and will remain. The following remedy against caterpillars on vines was recommended in Roman times by Cato. Amurca is the dregs left over after skimming off the olive oil, not the solids.

Strain stored amurca and pour two congii (=12 pints) into a copper vessel; heat over a gentle fire, stirring constantly with a stick until it reaches the consistency of honey. Take one-third sextarius of bitumen (1 sextarius = 1 pint) and one-fourth sextarius of sulphur, pulverise each in a mortar separately, and add in very small quantities to the warm amurca, at the same time stirring with a stick, and let it boil again in the open; for if you boil it under cover it will blaze up when the mixture of bitumen and sulphur is added. When it reaches the consistency of glue let it cool. Apply this around the trunk and under the branches, and the caterpillars will not appear.



THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN

Hugo Latymer

Judith MacDonald asks important questions in No. 6 of our Journal about how you define a Mediterranean Garden and invites comment. Obviously this is a question that affects the very identity of our Society – and presumably we should certainly have a clear idea of exactly what it is to which we belong.

One can try to define a Mediterranean Garden in a number of ways, the most important of which would seem to be to equate it to the mediterranean climate. The only snag to this approach is that you are hardly better off until you define the mediterranean climate; so far as I know, this has never been done accurately, though it would be helpful to know if I am wrong. In general you can say that it is a warm temperature climate with dry summers, and you may then give figures for temperatures, humidities, geology, hours of sunshine and rainfall by months. The spread between extremes is wide in each case: Malaga and Thessaloniki do not have the same winter climate. You will get from 250 litres of rain a year in some parts of Mallorca and over 1,000 litres at others only 75km away. And not all the Mediterranean has a mediterranean climate. Might a norm look like this? The figures are targets to be shot down...

Rainfall. 200 l/m² to 1200 l/m², typically 650 l/m², 90% of this falling outside the months of June, July and August. The real test is the length of time for which there is an excess of evaporation over rainfall but I do not have evaporation figures for the Mediterranean.

Temperature. An absolute minimum of 8°C below zero, hopefully half this. Not more than 20 frosts/year.

Sunshine. 1500 hours of sunlight during the summer half-year, 600 hours during the winter months, with an insolation strength very roughly corresponding to 35° North and South of the equator.

Humidity. I do not know enough to give humidity norms, but it is an important consideration. Many New Zealand

plants, for instance, do not seem to get enough aerial dampness to prosper perfectly. Florida is usually excluded from maps of the mediterranean climate for being damp, unlike California which is broadly dry, though the temperatures are similar.

Geology. This is not easy to specify. The bulk of the Mediterranean soils are calcareous. But we cannot include the southern half of Menorca which is indeed calcareous and exclude the northern half because it is not.

You can also define the climate in terms of the ranges of certain plants, those of *Quercus ilex* or *Pinus halepensis* for instance, but even these two, which are probably the best of many "indicator plants", have their failings. *Quercus ilex* does not reach to the Eastern shores of the area nor *Pinus halepensis* westwards to the Atlantic coasts from Lisbon to Casablanca which are normally considered to be included in the mediterranean climate.

There is a certain equality of culture throughout parts of the area, based on the Greek, Roman and Arabic cultures, but this gives no basis for defining the area.

No! Despite Judith's laudable desire to bring exactitude to this problem I rather doubt whether one can do much more than say a "Mediterranean Garden" is a garden in "the Mediterranean" and leave it at that. After all, we know what an elephant is without specifying the length of his snout!

COPING WITH THE CLIMATE IN THE ALPES MARITIMES

Joanna Millar

When we first came to the Côte d'Azur in 1966 it seemed that the summers were hot and long, starting in May and continuing until September. Then, in the mid-seventies the weather in our part of the Alpes Maritimes changed so drastically that the locals ruefully said, 'Ce n'est plus la Côte d'Azur'! This change of microclimate was due, some of the theorists claimed, to the geographical alteration of the land. During the time in question, the Autoroute La Provençale was completed, gouging out parts of the mountains and thus creating down-draughts of cold air from the Hautes Alpes. The second large geographical change was the flooding of a long valley to form the Lac de Sainte Croix at the western end of the Gorges de Verdun, some 20 kilometres long and five kilometres wide, producing more cool air and mists, and thus retarding our summers. Some years the cloud and mists would cover our mountains until late June, and there was little hot sunny weather until the beginning of July.

All this changed again; we had no appreciable rain for four years: the water table fell drastically, wells began to dry up and the shortage of water became acute, as it did in other parts of Europe. The latest theory, of course, is global warming.

For several years now, rain has been plentiful and we are no longer struggling in the summer to keep precious plants alive - so which theorist is right? In the 300-odd years that records have been kept at Greenwich there have been many periods of drought, followed by torrential rains. So could we now be going through another period of change with downpours followed by drought and drought followed by downpours and floods?

We are blessed, or cursed, in this region with many microclimates, so that plants which grow in my garden may fail as little as 10 kilometres away or vice versa. This, of course, is not due solely to climate; there are many other factors such as soil, exposure to winds and so on. For this reason it is very difficult to give sound advice on what to do and when. There is so much at stake in the lie of the land, the prevailing winds, frost pockets, heat and damp.

The first and most important thing to do when starting a new garden is to discover from where the prevailing wind comes; the famous Mistral blows reasonably infrequently here, but when it does it tears across the land snapping off branches, pulling off leaves, breaking cypresses, uprooting trees, knocking flowerpots off walls and creating all sorts of havoc. It roars down the Rhône valley from the north and by the time it reaches the Alpes Maritimes it appears to blow, not from the north, but almost from due west. Prolonged wind will 'burn' leaves – that is to say, it will dehydrate them – and there is nothing to be done once they have withered.

However, if you know you are in an exposed position you can protect your garden by planting fast-growing hedges or windbreaks to filter the wind and slow down the speed of its passage. These hedges can be of *Leylandii* cypress, hornbeam, laurel, laurustinus, pittosporum or privet, which are all reasonably quick-growing provided you dig a good trench at least 18 inches (45 cm) deep, line it with a few small pebbles for drainage, a layer of old leaves and compost, and another layer of really good soil. Into this you plant the trees, firm them in, attach them to stout stakes (old nylon stockings make very good ties for trees) and of course water them regularly.

A mature hedge will protect the garden on the sheltered side to a distance of nearly ten times its height, whereas a wall will not act as a windbreak as it will only divert the wind to another part of the garden. Leave the stakes until the trees have put down firm roots (a good six months); in some instances, as with the eucalyptuses, it is better to leave them permanently staked. These trees are very fragile and their trunks snap off easily in a wind. If this should happen, cut them down to a level of four or five feet and they will shoot up again. If your garden is very windy it might be worthwhile to keep them trimmed as shrubs; they are very pretty pruned this way and it lowers the risk of losing them.

Another wind we occasionally have to contend with is the Scirocco, the hot wind from the North African desert. It brings with it a thin covering of yellow sand which, although not dangerous, makes everything look dirty. It has even been known to reach London! If plants are heavily coated with sandy dust they will not be able to breathe and you should give them a delicate spraying with a garden hose.

The mists which can settle on our mountaintops are also destructive as they can bring mildew, black spot and other allied diseases to the roses. As soon as the symptoms appear you must treat your plants in the appropriate manner with special sprays.

After having determined the force and the direction of the winds it is important to turn your attention to the question of frosts. Your altitude above sea level will give some indication of cold, although frost is a very capricious enemy. There are 'frost pockets' in every region and, unless you have neighbours who can inform you of local conditions on your arrival, it will mostly be trial and error for a few years. Buy yourself a minimaxi thermometer and put it in what appears to be the coldest part of your garden. Orientation, of course, is very important; a garden facing due south will have appreciably more warmth in winter than one on a north-facing slope. However, only time can tell you exactly how vulnerable you are to frosts.

We are at nearly 1200 feet and find that although we face due south it is difficult to grow bougainvillea, mimosa, echiums and anthemis, not to mention geraniums and daturas [brugmansias] – but these we bring in under cover in the late autumn. Remember that frost rolls downhill rather like water to lie at the bottom of a hollow and create havoc. Your garden may lie in the path of a downhill eddy, so be forewarned and do not waste time nurturing tender plants and shrubs. There are plenty which can withstand minimum temperatures and also contend with the hot, dry summers. You can, however, alleviate this cold downward tumble by planting groups of hardy shrubs in its path such as *Pinus nigra*, *P. sylvestris*, *P. maritimus* [now considered a synonym of *P. halepensis*], thuyas, junipers, *Mahonia aquifolium* [now *Berberis aquifolium*],

philadelphus, *Cotinus coggygria*, *Taxus* (yew), *Elaeagnus*, *Tamarix* – the list is quite long. These will take the brunt of the cold current which will lose much of its force at their feet.

Our weather has been very changeable within the last few years and sometimes rainfall has been negligible. Water is thus at a premium, becoming more and more expensive, and we have not always been able to water our plants as we would like. Water cuts can be frequent and without warning. The average temperatures in June, July and August for the past few years have been 26, 29 and 30 degrees Celsius respectively.

It is, therefore, very important to try to provide as much shade in the garden as possible. It cannot have gone unnoticed that nearly all the old *mas* or farmhouses which have survived in Provence have large lime trees growing directly in front of them to provide a cool screen from the summer's scorching heat. So, when you are planning your garden, take into consideration the idea of planting a few large-spreading trees to give you shade in summer – limes, catalpas, figs, mulberries, etc.

To make the most of whatever water is available, remember the cardinal rule that it is *much* better to give your plants a good soaking once or twice a week and let the water penetrate right down to their roots than a trickle every day. Water either very early in the morning or, preferably, late in the evening to avoid evaporation, and your plants will be grateful to you.

SYNERGISTIC GARDENING (PART I)

Jenny Bussey

In the MGS Journals to date, the emphasis seems to me to be heavily on "natural" gardening, using methods and plants that make life easier because they work well in Mediterranean conditions. As many of us are either busy working people or retired ex-pats, anything that makes gardening easier should be taken seriously, especially when theory can be successfully backed up by scientific reasoning.

I have been gardening on the Costa Blanca for some eight years, with indifferent success, especially in the kitchen garden. Before coming to Spain, I lived in Kent where I also had a garden. I have been interested in organic methods for many years and have also read about Bio-dynamic gardening and Permaculture. I have tried to put many of the ideas gleaned into practice, but it always seemed to be an up-hill struggle to maintain the vigour and health of the plants I grew, especially here in Spain, so that often, reluctantly but in desperation, I have resorted to chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Now, having attended a talk and video presentation, followed by a two-day workshop on "Synergistic Agriculture" given by Emilia Hazelip, I understand where I was going wrong and how I can put fertility and health back into my garden permanently. Emilia is an experienced organic farmer. In 1978 she read about the work of Masanobu Fukuoka in Japan where he has been experimenting for over 50 years with ways of cultivating the soil so that fertility is increased rather than depleted, as happens with all traditional agricultural methods at present being practised. Coming to live in France ten years ago, she tried to put his advice into practice, but found that the climate in the Mediterranean Pyrenees was very different from that of Japan, so she has learnt by trial and error to adapt his method to fit Mediterranean conditions.

Let us look first at how we have been taught to farm and garden on our lovely planet, Earth. What an appropriate name – Earth. Without earth, this planet could not support life on the land but, throughout history mankind has exploited it and done little, or the wrong things, to support it in its herculean task. Of course, there are other essentials for land-based life to exist, none of which can be removed: air, water, light, warmth. These interact with the earth to produce plants, which then support all terrestrial animal life.

Since man discovered that it is easier to grow the crops he needs close to where he lives, rather than going out to find them in the wild, he has practised agriculture - the control of the soil and its produce for his own ends. For 10,000 years now he has removed the natural tree or grass covering of the earth and dug or ploughed the bare patches he has created to grow the crops he needs. When the soil inevitably became thin and infertile, he has either moved on to new virgin territory, or he used various methods to enrich it again so that he can continue to get good yields from his efforts. But he has never, until very recently in the history of mankind with the work of Fukuoka, realised that his agricultural methods are the direct cause of the loss of fertility and that there is a way to farm or garden that respects the needs of the soil and adds to its fertility without the need for expensive additives or time- or energyconsuming cultural methods.

Fukuoka's method gives us four principles to follow:

- 1. NO cultivation
- 2. NO added fertilisers
- 3. NO chemical treatments
- 4. NO compaction

Emilia has taken these four principles and used them to grow plants of every sort in a mediterranean climate. Let's take them one at a time to see how the theory works.

First, NO cultivation: this means no ploughing, digging, hoeing or any other disturbance of the soil beyond what is necessary to sow seeds or plant plants. The only exceptions to this rule are when you are starting out on soil that either is badly compacted or has been ploughed regularly and has therefore developed a hard pan of compacted soil and mineral

deposits underneath where the plough reached down to. In these cases, the hard soil must be broken up at the start.

After this, any further cultivation which disturbs the soil structure must be avoided. It is this "turning the soil over" that destroys fertility because the soil loses its structure and the organisms that live in the soil are killed off by the excess air introduced, by the disturbance digging or ploughing causes, or by being put at a level at which they cannot function.

Next, use NO fertilisers. This is probably the most difficult rule to understand. We have been brought up to believe the soil needs extra feeding, with compost, manure, natural or chemical fertilisers, to make it productive. Certainly, the soil is a digestive organ but it does not need force feeding, which will only give it "indigestion" and the activity of its inhabitants will be upset, even destroyed, and pathological conditions develop, with the resultant proliferation of problems in plants growing in it.

So, how can we increase fertility in the soil without digging in additional material? The most fertile soils in the world are found in undisturbed forests and plains where all plant matter is recycled, with some animal residues on the surface. As soon as a seed germinates and starts to grow, chemical reactions within the plant occur, due to the sunlight it receives, which enable it to transform elements in the soil, water and air into new tissue. Plants are the only organisms on Earth that are able to use sunlight directly in this way to create more matter. As plants die or shed dead leaves or branches, animals, insects, and a wide variety of soil dwellers hurry to break down the dead material, incorporating it slowly into the upper layer of the soil where more organisms continue the process until the minerals contained in the plant material are released and can once again be absorbed by roots to nourish new plants. The soil organisms themselves proliferate and their spent bodies add to the soil when their life is over.

If we imitate this process, the fertility of our soil will improve. The soil surface must, therefore, be kept covered with a mulch of organic matter at all times – anything that was once part of a plant can be used and, because it is not being dug in, there is no risk of nitrogen robbery from woody

material. This mulch not only provides matter to be broken down, but also protects the soil from the direct action of the sun, wind and rain, all of which damage soil structure, and it keeps the soil moist so that soil life can continue unabated close to the surface. The addition of fertilisers of any sort interferes with the delicate balance needed for organic matter to be properly broken down and absorbed.

Rule 3, NO chemical treatments, refers to anything we use either in or on the soil, or on any plants that are growing in it. Pests and diseases of plants are the direct result of an imbalance in the soil, which results in weaknesses which are recognised as undesirable. An infestation is, therefore, Nature's way of removing a sick plant to make way for a healthy specimen instead. You will notice that "weeds" and indigenous plants in undisturbed places very rarely suffer badly from pests because they are growing in conditions that suit them and they are, therefore healthy and resistant to attack. Put them in a stressed soil, however, and they will succumb just like any other plant.

So what should we do when a plant is covered in aphids or mildew? Firstly, this is an indication that the plant is under stress, maybe from lack of water (or too much), too much or too little sun, in a windy position, etc. so we must either change it for a more suitable one, change its position or protect it from the elements where it is. With pest attacks, usually there are predators around who are just waiting for a good meal. If we kill the pest with a spray immediately, the predators go hungry and die, the pest returns and there are no predators to deal with it, so the second attack is even worse and we have to resort to spraying every few weeks to keep it under control throughout the season - good for the chemical business, but not good for your pocket or your garden. Besides which, many sprays are toxic to you and to other animals, as well as to soil life. Using organic pesticides creates the same conditions, even though they do not contaminate the environment.

Remember, a healthy soil will produce healthy, well fed, disease-resistant plants and you should tolerate a small amount of damage by pests so that the predators who will keep them down to a reasonable number throughout the year can

thrive too. As you change over to this method you may find you are still getting bad attacks of aphids, for instance. Try to be patient and see if they are controlled by predators but, if not, use the least invasive way possible of removing them, for instance by hand or with a strong spray of plain or soapy water. Even slugs and snails can be kept within limits by predatory animals, but to begin with it may be necessary to remove them or use barriers around newly transplanted seedlings – like us, they prefer sweet, juicy food!

Finally, NO compaction of the soil. This means we must not walk on the areas where we are growing our plants, nor use any heavy machinery which will squash the air out of the soil. Soil organisms need air filtered through the mulch and soil to breathe, especially those in the top few centimetres, and they cannot function if air is not present. Another way of robbing them of air is by flooding the ground when watering, and the method of sheet watering as practised around the Mediterranean has done much to reduce the fertility of the soil. Water is, of course, necessary, but it must be given slowly into soils that contain sufficient humus to absorb and hold it so that soil organisms are not killed. Rain that falls on bare soil brings fine clay particles to the surface which then bake hard into an impenetrable crust which cracks as it dries, all of which destroys soil life. The answer lies in that protective mulch which shields the soil surface from the rain, wind and sun.

SUNDRIES

THE HERB SOCIETY

If you would like to find out more about the useful herbs which grow in your garden or on the nearby hillside, you may be interested in the UK-based Herb Society. The Society publishes a journal three times a year which covers every aspect of herbs, including cultivation, culinary and medical uses, and history. They have a programme of events in the UK, and books and seeds are available by post. For further details contact The Herb Society, 134 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SA, UK.

THE MILLENNIUM SEED BANK APPEAL, KEW

Over the next 50 years, a quarter of the world's seed-bearing plant species will face extinction. It's a terrifying thought, especially when the future of every species will then be put at risk – including ours.

An enormous seed collection programme has already begun at the Millennium Seed Bank, Kew – a specially designed facility at Wakehurst Place, West Sussex. It's the most ambitious conservation project of its kind. By the year 2010, it aims to have conserved living seeds from 10% of all plant species for the benefit of future generations. Once in the Seed Bank, species can be kept for centuries or even millennia. They can be studied to discover their hidden potential, and reintroduced into the wild at any time.

The Millennium Seed Bank Appeal Kew, P.O. Box 4370, London SW15 2PF. For credit card donations, call 0973 10 2000.

VIDEOS

If you were unable to visit the Chelsea Flower Show this year, you can still enjoy it on video. Two Four Productions has produced the RHS's official video of the Show: an hour-long film including all the highlights of the 1996 event from the spectacular gardens to the gold medal winning displays in the Great Marquee.

They are also the producers of *Wisley Through the Seasons*. This four-part series, designed to be both informative and inspirational, follows the seasons at the Royal Horticultural Society's famous garden.

The videos are produced in PAL or NTSC format for North America and Japan. For information contact Two Four Productions Limited, Quay West Studios, Old Newnham, Plymouth PL7 5BH, UK. Tel: 01752-345424, Fax: 01752-344924.

Special Plants

Readers in Britain may like to visit Derry Watkins at Special Plants, Hill Farm Barn, Greenways Lane, Cold Ashton, Chippenham SN14 8LA (Tel. 01225-891686). Her nursery is quoted as being 'one of the best U.K. nurseries for plants likely to be Mediterranean-friendly'.

RIVIERA GARDEN AND ART SEMINAR

The one-week French Riviera Garden and Art Seminar, planned and conducted by Dr. Louisa Jones, will be held at the Château de la Napoule between April 20th and April 27th 1997. Daily morning lectures will be followed by convivial lunches in the Château Dining Room and afternoon excursions to famous Riviera gardens and to private gardens of art collectors and artists. The number of participants will be limited to 15. For further information and bookings, contact Holly Warner, 151, rue L.M.Nordman, 75013 Paris, France. Tel. (33) 01.43.31.99.50, Fax (33) 01.43.37.20.99

THE GOOD BULB GUIDE

The 1996 Good Bulb Guide, which includes a list of retailers who have pledged not to sell wild-collected bulbs, is available from Fauna & Flora International, Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge CB1 2DT, U.K.



BOOKS

Gardens of the Sun by Trevor Nottle. Published by Kangaroo Press Pty Ltd, 1996. ISBN 0-86417-664-3

This book is interesting to Mediterranean gardeners for being written by an Australian primarily for an Australian public, and though much of Southern and Western Australia has, technically speaking, the mediterranean climate that we enjoy here, the botanical background is wholly distinct. The book therefore is dealing with a philosophy and environment rather different from that of the Old World, and in it one can discover many new ideas (as in his chapter on light and shade) and meet enough plants little known in the Mediterranean to please any plantsman (forty-seven different cultivars of *Agapanthus* are listed, for example).

But it is in no way a book of reference or of classified advice, a sample of the chapter titles being 'Let springs of fresh water rise', 'Horti-cultural baggage', 'Lessons with stones', 'Native diversions and other problems', 'Manavlins for mavens', 'The time to plant crocuses'.

The title of the book is not, moreover, self-explanatory to the prospective reader who, on picking it up, seeks to know its scope. Apart from an oblique reference in the acknowledgments to "gardening in a warm dry climate where winters are wet and cool and summers hot and dry..." and "warm dry climate" (which would cover most of the world's deserts) in the introduction, it is not until one reaches p.11

that one finds a chapter headed 'One continuous summer. The Mediterranean climate' – a synonymy with which my central heating bill does not allow me to agree.

After a further couple of pages on competitive plantsmanship that may amuse some, phrases like "warm dry climate or to use another common and equally general term 'A Mediterranean Climate'" begin to be found. Shortly we have a definition of a warm temperate climate as being broadly "all those places lying between latitudes 30° and 40° north and south of the equator", a definition that embraces Cairo and Pittsburgh but which excludes nearly half of the Mediterranean.

But by p. 17 we are beginning to confirm our first guess, based on the biographical notes on the end wrapper, that the book will be dealing with the arts of gardening in the mediterranean climate or something like it.

However readers may even then become confused. Trevor Nottle keeps saying that the cultivation of plants like *Rhododendron sinogrande*, *Meconopsis betonicifolia* and *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* is the passport to renown of 'real' gardeners while inveighing against trying to cultivate such plants in a mediterranean climate, as if anyone in their right mind would really harbour such a thought. And he then sabotages an admirable personal crusade to get his readers to concentrate on plants suitable for warm dry climates rather than on those that make "the glorious gardens of Normandy, Gloucestershire and Connecticut" by spending all of a page telling us ways to escape the crowds at Hidcote and Sissinghurst. It would have been more interesting perhaps to hear less about English and more about Australian gardens.

He is refreshingly outspoken on many themes. I feel particularly in sympathy with his views on swimming pools ("eyesores", "blatant, brilliant blueness").

The photographs, mainly taken by the author, are a great feature of the book.

A perusal of the index brings some odd facts to light. There is no mention in the book of the palm genera *Phoenix*, *Washingtonia* or *Syagrus*. Under "palm" there are four pages indexed but only *Butia* gets as much as a line. *Pittosporum* gets

no mention at all when surely *P. tobira* is one of the workhorses of garden designers in mediterranean climates. "Orange" gets two mentions in passing. The index does include one reference to five words on "lemon tree pots" but none to the attractive whole page illustration of them. Rosemary is once given half a line: less than *Paparazzi*, *Glitterati* or *Pizzazz*.

Callistemons are not mentioned beyond a one-word mention of "Bottlebrushes" which puts them on a par with bravura, gravitas, multiculturalism, frisson and Burra wallahs, while there is no mention at all of Abelia, Brachychiton, Cortaderia (nor Pampas grass), Felicia, Hakea, Melaleuca, Metrosideros or Templetonia though several of these genera are Australian. Westringia is not given in the index but I found a mention on p.140.

Parts of the book that I particularly liked were those on mulching with newspaper, covering brick walls, light and shade (Chapter "Black and Green") and the listing at the end of "Seeds, Sources & Societies" with a good and comprehensive Bibliography. With this book one should be carried along rolling the ears of corn in one's hands. Once one has come to terms with the colloquial baroque prose in which this book is intermittently dressed, one can find much fat, ripe grain. It should find ready acceptance in Australia, the Mediterranean, California and England.

Hugo Latymer

NOTE: The publishers inform us that *Gardens of the Sun* will soon be available in Europe through Hi Marketing, 38 Carver Road, London SE24 9LT; they will be able to give the UK price and date of publication (early 1997).

LETTERS

I have an herb garden and am always on the lookout for new sources of herb seeds or, better yet, plants. I have found an herb nursery in England and thought your readers might be interested in this source of herb plants.

The Springfield Herb Nursery publishes a mail order catalogue. Their list includes over 200 varieties including a good selection of sages, thymes, tanacetums and mints. The prices are reasonable, ranging from 90p to £2.00 plus a flat postage and handling rate of £5.00 for orders going abroad. The only drawback in placing an order is that payment must be in pounds sterling.

I have placed an order with them for a variety of plants and have since received my order. The plants (actually rooted cuttings) were received within two weeks of my posting the order and were all in good condition. The larger transplants such as the sages and *Alchemilla mollis* have been planted directly into the garden. The smaller plants, such as the thymes, have been potted up until the spring for eventual planting out.

The mail order catalogue, actually a computer print-out, can be obtained by writing to the following address:

Springfield Herb Nursery 61 Springfield Lane Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 4EW England.

> Sue Goumas, Patras, Greece

While compiling the index for volumes 1-3 of the Journal, several interesting facts appeared. The most evident of these is that we appear to be a society of plantsmen. (We don't say huperson!)

I thought that this was a characteristic of bodies like the Royal Horticultural Society in Great Britain, but that a tradition of sculptural Renaissance gardens of steps and statuary, as well as a preoccupation in planting genera that withstood the vicissitudes of a summer drought, might have generated a greater interest in how than in what. The expectation was reinforced by my experience of the plant-buying public in my nursery on Mallorca, who on the whole, when asked what they are looking for, say something like "A big red one". A very sensible answer!

However, in the index of Latin names to volumes 1, 2 and 3 there are about 770 entries. Of these plants less than 10% are mentioned more than once. The Award for Most Mentioned Plant goes to *Salvia officinalis* (seven mentions), with *Sternbergia lutea* and *Chamaerops humilis* as runners-up (each with four). Amongst the threes, of which there are relatively few, occur *Gerinthe retorta*, *Gaura lindheimeri* and *Sutherlandia frutescens*. Obviously we are all just collectors, as it might be of cigarette cards or stamps, and maybe that is the joy of gardening!

Genera that surprise one with their total absence are *Buxus*, *Schinus*, *Bauhinia*, *Ligustrum*, *Juniperus*, *Melia*, figs other than *Ficus carica*, and orchids.

Hugo Latymer, Mallorca, Baleares, Spain

The publisher Giorgio Mondadori has presented gardeners with a brand-new plantfinder for Italy, *IL CERCAPIANTE*. I have not seen it personally but am advised that it lists '15,000 rare and less rare plants and 400 nurseries'.

Am I too optimistic to foresee that soon we shall order such useful things as *Arbutus andrachne* and *Pistacia vera* (the edible pistachio), *Laurus nobilis* 'Nana' and every mediterranean-climate plant under the sun by fax – only to remember later with nostalgia our plant hunting trips when often we returned home triumphantly with not more than a single coveted specimen?

Heidi Gildemeister, Baleares, Spain I shall follow with interest the comments in your pages about the roses that grow in your areas: I find that my choice of roses here is quite different. I'm enjoying trying the Alister Clark roses bred specifically for Australian conditions and proven here. Perhaps an article by Trevor Nottle would be timely and helpful?

> Kaye Stokes, Melbourne, Australia

The journal gets steadily more 'solid' and 'professional' though, every virtue having its accompanying vice, the associated disadvantage is the rise of designerism with its 'must' and 'have to'... loathsome words to attach to gardening activity. The tone of much of Judith MacDonald's article was lively, perceptive and direct but sentences such as "A garden must blend into the encompassing countryside..." or "There has to be a contemporary statement made in a garden..." have your humble correspondent on hands and knees in a far corner of the room trying to retrieve a distinctly battered *The Mediterranean Garden* No. 6 from under a mighty Edwardian wardrobe, whither fury had flung it. I do hope some sturdy representative of the 'incorrect and lacking in aesthetic' classes will stand up on the pages of a subsequent issue and Have Words.

So Eliano Pallaro's article was even *more* delightful by contrast, though it would have been delightful in any case and context. "Discreet and reserved tones, never aggressive." Even so, even so.

Tim Longville Cumbria, U.K.

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE MGS

Dear Members.

For those of you who were not present at the Annual General Meeting of the Society, held on November 29th, I would like to expand on my proposal that the next President of the MGS should be chosen from another country.

Our total membership at the time of the AGM was 501, 201 of whom live or have gardens in Greece and 300 elsewhere. If the Society's membership increases at this rate and in these proportions in the coming year, we can anticipate that at the next AGM we shall have about 1000 members, 400 in Greece and 600 in the rest of the world.

As an international society it seems appropriate that the Presidency should move from country to country, thus ensuring the participation of other countries in the decision and policy making of the MGS.

Many may object that the conducting of the Administrative Committee meetings will be hampered by the fact that the President is not bodily present. Such difficulties can surely be overcome by the use of modern means of communication such as fax and/or e-mail.

In time the formation of local committees may evolve, resulting in the decentralising of much administrative work such as the collection of subscriptions and the dispatching of journals. However, it seems to me premature to consider this at the moment.

Joanna Millar's idea that the AGM should be held annually in a different country is worth serious consideration. She envisages the organising of a few days of excursions, lectures and social gatherings around the meeting. Perhaps we could try out this idea next year in Greece, holding the AGM in mid-October. Our constitution requires that it be held between October 1st and December 23rd. Making an annual event of the AGM would be exciting and fun, resulting in many

contacts and friendships made face to face, not merely epistolary.

One example of such transnational collaboration in action is the fact that, while our journal is published in Greece, the index of plant names for Vols. 1-3 included in this issue was prepared in Spain. On behalf of the MGS I should like to thank Hugo Latymer for this labour of love, as well as Richard Dight for his valuable help in indexing Vol. 1.

And now to more mundane matters. Please note that on the right-hand corner of the address label of your journal is a reference number, for example 1/100/95. These numbers denote the month and the year in which you joined the Society (i.e. in this example January 1995), with between them your personal membership number coded for your country of residence. This information is included on the label in order to help remind you when your subscription falls due for renewal, and thus to obviate the unecessary expense of sending out renewal notices. Please note too that payment of MGS subscriptions may be made by personal cheque.

With all good wishes for 1997,

Sally Razelou

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.

PIERO CANETI is a landscape designer and gardener at Velletri near Rome. His book *Il Giardino Mediterraneo Secondo Natura* is published by Edagricole.

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

BILL GRANT is a garden writer, tour organizer, old and species rose addict who also grows a great number of Australian plants.

C. R. ILLINGWORTH, when she is not in France, gardens in London, Surrey and Norfolk. She is the editor of a number of cookery and gardening books.

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

PHILIP McMILLAN BROWSE is Senior Consultant at the Penpol Horticultural Consultancy, Truro, Cornwall, U.K.

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

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.

CRAIG P. VERZONE & CRISTINA WOODS are landscape architects and urbanists based in Switzerland.

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.

KATHRYN WILLIAMS gardens in northern Provence where she has been gradually rehabilitating a dilapidated farmhouse garden.

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