



What is a “Cottage Garden”?

By Patrick Lavelle, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

The cottage garden was believed to have originated in England during the Tudor period (circa: late 1400's) when the country enjoyed an extended period of peace, leading to a renaissance. With new exotic plants brought from the East and the New World, there was an intense interest in gardening across the land. The poorer people who dwelt in their small, humble cottages had to plant hardy plants such as vegetables, annuals, berries, vines, perennials, small trees, irises, daisies, daylilies, foxgloves, and flowers to attract bees and other insects for pollination. Today we call these “cottage garden plants” or “passalong plants” or seeds that are shared between gardeners. Generally, the gardens had enough land for the cultivation of food, as well as the rearing of chickens and pigs.

What Sets Cottage Gardens Apart

Cottage gardens are described as warm, personable gardens. Let's look at some of the characteristics which set them apart from other gardens.

- **Informal Design:** Instead of orderly rows of plants, the cottage garden has thick borders, masses of plants, and various plant groupings.
- **Closely Grown Plants:** There are not many open spaces in cottage gardens. All the plants are packed together to fully utilize available space.
- **Various Plant Groupings:** A cottage garden has a great variety of plants like bulbs, perennials, herbs, trees, shrubs, vegetables, berries, vines, and annuals.
- **Filled with Life:** The various plants attract many types of wildlife like frogs, birds, bees, and butterflies.

Starting Your Own Cottage Garden

Here are some tips to help you start your own cottage garden.

- **Structures:** Structures within the garden should accentuate the garden format. Wooden fences and gates are always recommended, but they should be proportionate to the garden. Try to add

arbors, trellises, seating areas, and arches for finer detail. Cottage gardens were typically small and space was maximized by going vertical with plants on arches and walls, including espaliering plants, and by pathways that divide beds.

- **Walkways:** Walkways should be created to meet your requirements, but it's important to make sure that they are proportionate to the size of the cottage garden. Think about the size and the materials of the walkways.
- **Beds:** Build your planting beds according to the size of the garden and the cottage or house. It is also essential to consider the depth of the beds. Generally, it's harder to maintain beds which are more than 8 feet in depth. Since you will be planting a large variety of plants, you should pack the beds with organic material beforehand.
- **Planting:** By grouping similar plant materials, you can achieve a greater visual impact in the garden. Color is used to accentuate other principles of design. Always try to create balance, harmony, and rhythm with colors. You can also create some harmony and depth by mixing plants with different textures in the garden.
- **Popular Flowers:** Some of the popular plant types used in cottage gardens are annuals, bulbs, perennials, shrubs, vines, and small trees, like small fruit trees including smaller varieties of apple, plum, pear, cherry. (Fruit tree varieties for our area need a specific number of "chill hours".) Popular flowers include daisies, hibiscus, crocosmia, coneflower, daylilies, and roses.

Here are some of the plant varieties we used in our former cottage demonstration garden:

Common Name	Scientific Name
Abelmoschus Hibiscus	Abelmoschus moschatus (edible)
Althea Rose of Sharon	Hibiscus syriacus
Apricot Drift Rose	Rosa Apricot Drift
Asiatic Lily	
Banana Shrub	Michelia figo
Beauty Crossvine Tangerine	
Becky Shasta Daisy	Leucanthemum x superbum Becky
Bee Balm	
Bermuda's Pink Pet China Rose	Rosa Caldwell Pink (Earthkind)
Blackeyed Susan	Goldsturm Rudbeckia
Blue & White Salvia	
Blue Plumbago	Plumbago auriculata
Bridal Wreath Spires	Spiraea prinifolia

Common Name	Scientific Name
Bugleweed	Burgundy Glow
Butterfly Weed	Asclepias curassavica
Canna	Canna x generalis
Chocolate Chip Bugleweed	Ajuga chocolate chip
Climbing Pinkie Rose	Rosa Climbing Pinkie (Earthkind)
Colorific Louisiana Iris	
Compact Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow	Brunfelsia pauciflora
Confederate Rose Hibiscus	Hibiscus mutabilis
Coral Nymph Salvia	Salvia coccinea Coral Nymph
Coreopsis Uptick	Coreopsis Uptick
Country Dancer Buck Rose	Rosa Country Dancer
Country Girl Chrysanthemum	Chrysanthemum Country Girl
Scarlet Queen Elizabeth Rose	Rosa Scarlet Queen Elizabeth
Crapemyrtle Tree	Lagerstroemia
Crinum Lily	Crinum Maurine Spinks
Crocoshmia	Crocoshmia
Evening Primrose	
Evergreen Wisteria	Millettia reticulata
Four O'Clock	Mirabilis jalapa
Foxtail Fern	Protasparagus densiflorus Meyersii
Gold Shower Thryallis	Galphimia Glauca
Grandma's Yellow Rose	Rosa Nacogdoches (Superstar)
Hamabo Hisbiscus	Hibiscus syriacus Hamabo
Hannah Ray Bottlebrush	Callistemon viminalis Hannah Ray
Hardy Gloxinia	Incarvillea delavayi

Common Name	Scientific Name
Hardy Ground Orchid	Bletilla striata
Jasmine	Trachelospermum jasminoides
John Fanick Phlox	Phlox pilosa John Fanick
Johnsonii Amaryllis	Hippeastrum x johnsonii
Jumbo Burgundy Crinum	Crinum Jumbo Burgundy
Lasting Pink Hibiscus	
Louisiana Iris	Iris sinfonietta
Madame Joseph Schwartz Rose	Rosa Madame Joseph Schwartz
McFadden's Pinkie Crape Myrtle	Lagerstroemia McFadden's Pinkie
Mexican Honeysuckle	Acanthaceae Justicia Spicigeia
Mexican Orchid Tree	Bauhinia Mexicana
Miniature Rose	
Orange Daylily	Hemerocallis fulva
Ornamental Pomegranate	Punica granatum
Oxalis	Oxalis crassipes
Peter's Purple Beebalm	Monarda Peter's Purple
Pink Champagne Clematis	Clematis Pink Champagne
Pink Rose	Rosa Natchitoches Noisette
Prairie Phlox	Phlox pilosa Prairie
Queen Emma Crinum Lily	Crinum augustrum Queen Emma
Red Salvia	Salvia coccinea
Salvia	Salvia sp
Sedum	Sedum
Society Garlic	Tulbaghia violacea
Spider Lily	Hymenocallis sp

Common Name	Scientific Name
Star Flowers	Ipheion sellowianum
Summer Snowflake	Leucojum aestivum
Variegated Flax Lily	Dianella tasmanica variegata
Verbena (South America)	
Vinca Periwinkle	
Wandering Jew	Tradescantia Pallida
White Mistflower	Eupatorium wrightii
Woodland Painted Petals	Anomatheca laxa
Yellow Bells Esperanza	Tecoma stans Gold Star (Superstar)

References:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/southerngarden/Cottagedesign.html>

www.gardenforever.com/pages/the-cottage-garden.htm

Fort Bend County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who assist Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in educating the community using research-based horticultural information.