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Alpes & Côte d'Azur and Liguria

A study tour of significant historical and botanical gardens in the French and Italian Riviera, and observing plants in their natural habitat in the Maritime Alps.

Written by Jamie Bailey and Erin Welch



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Who we are

Erin is currently in her second year of her Level 3 Horticultural Supervisory apprenticeship with RHS Rosemoor. Erin began her career change in 2020, accomplishing her RHS Level 2 and moving to Devon to pursue a dream of living a more nature centric life in the countryside. Since then she has gained a wide experience of working in different garden settings; Market Garden producing veg boxes and flower shares, therapeutic and educational garden for children with alternative needs and a range of ornamental gardens. As a part of her training and development, Erin managed to gain experience working in two of the UKs most unique gardens - Tresco Abbey Gardens and Keith Wiley's Wildside. Both gardens are home to a diverse collection of plants whereby Erin was able to learn alot about the climate, history and its curators.

Jamie has been working for over 6 years as Head Gardener at a private estate in Dartmoor, Teignworthy Estate. An education at Stowe School became a catalyst for his love of horticulture from being surrounded by 700 acres of gardens designed by Charles Bridgman and Capability Brown. Since working at Teignworthy he has been able to develop a wide range of skills in gardening and horticulture, working with local consultants as much as possible to develop his knowledge of plants and the environments in which they grow.

Our plan

We carefully curated the list of gardens and locations based on our preferences and discussions with fellow horticultural colleagues who have visited the area. As well as a few particular influencers who helped to inspire us and finalise our list.

Alistair Griffiths (Head of Science at RHS) gave a very thought provoking talk at Erin's RHS induction which highlighted the importance of mediterranean and temperate plants and how the knowledge of and introduction of these in the UK will support our increasingly hotter climate. It seems imminent that we have a better understanding of what plants will and will not survive in the UK to help combat the changes in our climate.

Mike Nelhams (Curator at Tresco) who has been a great inspiration since Erin's time on Tresco, Mike has spent a lot of time in the Mediterranean Riviera leading garden tours, forming strong relationships with most of the gardens around this area.

David Richter (Botanist from Kew) who we came across in the July 22 edition of the Mediterranean Garden Society's Journal whereby David spoke about his new venture of creating a Botanic Garden in the Maritime Alps. We reached out and he was very helpful, adding a variety of wild locations to see a diverse range of plants that have naturalised or are native to these mountain ranges - where the Mediterranean meets the Apls.

To get the most out of our visits we reached out to each of our chosen gardens to organise a tour or informal chat with the owners or guardians. Most gardens responded very positively and as predicted this type of detail really made our trip, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of the history, horticultural practices and the people behind the gardens.

1. Palace of Versailles

2. Jardin Exotique d'Eze

3. Promenade du paillon

4. Serre de la Madone

5. Jardin Botanique Val Rahmeh

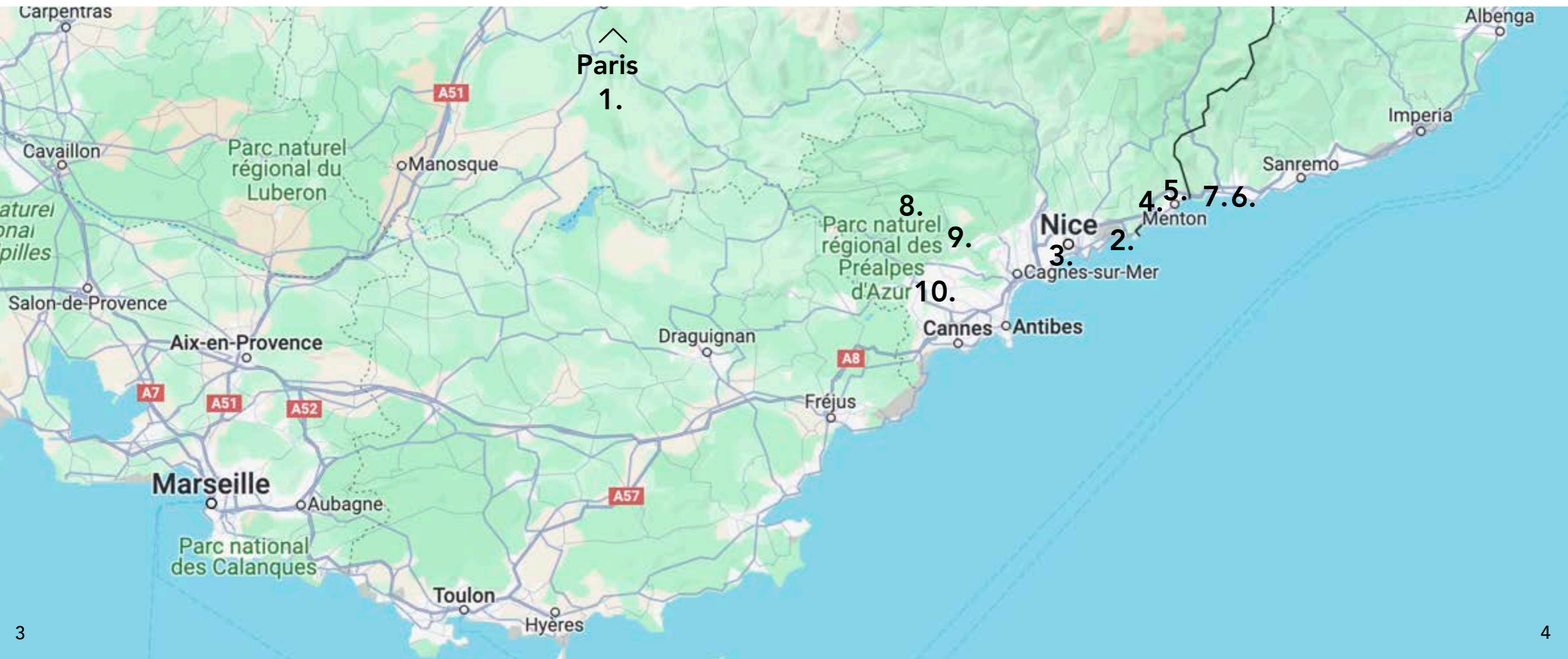
6. Villa Boccanegra

7. Hanbury Gardens

8. Jardins du MIP

9. Caussois

10. Gorge du Loup



Our mission

We chose to visit the Alpes d'Azur, Côte d'Azur and Liguria because this area of the Mediterranean has significant historical and botanical gardens, as well as a rich and diverse range of plant species from all over the world.

We have both always been interested in the connection between people and green spaces, in particular, the design of gardens and the historical context of their time. Having lived in Spain Erin has always had a special interest in the plants of mediterranean-climate regions and Jamie has always wanted the opportunity to experience gardens different to his own in order to draw comparisons and learn new, potentially drought tolerant plants to experiment with in Dartmoor.

As Gardeners we want to be able to continuously learn and develop our skills and knowledge, which is why having the opportunity to go to another country on a horticultural study tour is paramount. Here are some of the key objectives and aims of our trip:

To gain a deeper understanding of the history of the gardens and their importance in horticulture in their countries at the time, as well as their legacy today

To discuss the gardens with the relevant owner or guardian, ask questions and understand themes and history connected with them. Meeting the owners and gardeners will give us insight into the 'on the ground' running of the sites; the changes they've undergone, decision making, daily tasks and plant choices

To understand and recognise key design elements and formal garden styles during the 17th - 18th Century that shaped the English Victorian garden and continues to be adopted in British gardens today. To be able to identify these influences, contemplate and compare their horticultural origins and purpose

To learn new plant species will help to develop our overall understanding of plant suitability, propagation, positioning, and garden design

To recognise the culture and spirituality that sets British horticulture apart from other regions of the world so we can better understand the British obsession with gardens

To expand our knowledge of native and naturalised plants, trees and their habitats in this particular region in the Mediterranean

To gain knowledge of plants that will tolerate the changing British weather conditions that we have been previously unaware of





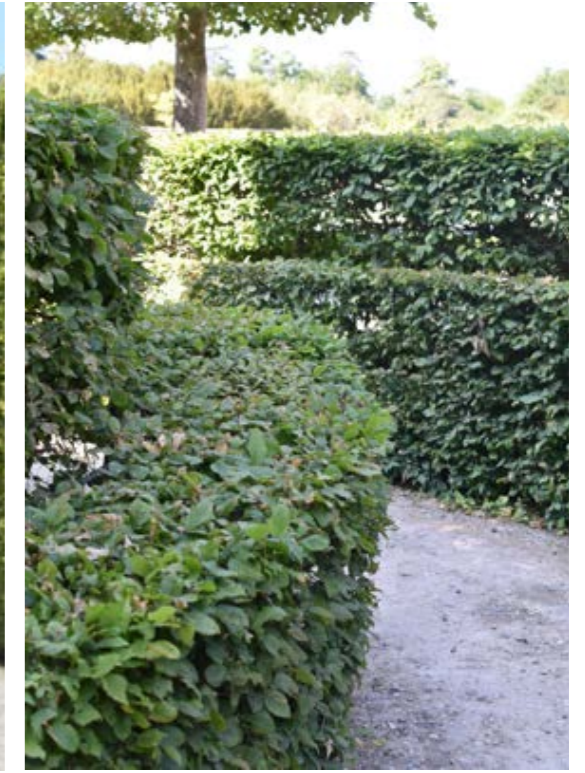
The Palace of Versailles

An average of 15,000,000 people visit the palace of Versailles each year which makes it one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world and it's easy to see why. Being the first destination on our horticultural study tour we were keen to get into the gardens, but we began with an audio guide of the palace. The ornate detail in the architecture and sheer extravagance in design truly defies expectations, with each room inspiring more awe than the previous, most notably the Hall of Mirrors; formerly a first floor terrace but now an eloquent banquet hall in which large mirrors sit opposite the windows of equal proportion, very effectively reflecting the gardens and therefore bringing the garden indoors in an unparalleled manner. At this point we could wait no longer to get out into the grounds and so scurried our way past long lines of tourists to step outside to the western terrace and gaze upon Andre le Notre's masterpiece.

In 1660 Le Notre began work designing and creating the gardens of Versailles under instruction from King Louis XIV of France, 8 years before it was to become the primary royal residence. Le Notre's work throughout his career and in particular Versailles represents the height of the French formal style and would go on to influence landscape designers such as Charles Bridgeman and Capability Brown. We noticed instantly the vastness of the view down to and beyond the Grand Canal, overlooking the Fontana di Latona and the ornate patterned lawns set in gravel, bordered by parterre Buxus sempervirens hedging and Taxus baccata topiaries all of similar size but different shapes. The view was one of great length exaggerated by the grand canal (1670m).



To the sides the gardens are hidden by very tall *Carpinus betulus* hedging but it is not until we entered the maze of paths through the groves that we got an idea of scale and why the hedging was so high. Each grove is in itself a remarkable garden, often heralded by tall architectural structures and water features that remain out of view from anywhere else in the garden due to the hornbeam hedging. At its peak, there were 2,400 fountains powered by water from the Seine pumped by machine de marly; today there are 50 functioning fountains.



Andre Le Notre's work at Versailles showcases an interplay of geometry, perspective, and symbolism. Characterised largely by symmetrical parterres, neat bosquets and orderly paths with sculptures, fountains and plant arrangements representing mythological figures and historical events. The emphasis on order and symmetry reflects the French Baroque style, highlighting grandeur and control over nature.





Jardin Exotique d'Eze

Le Jardin Exotique is situated at the highest point of the medieval village, Eze. The village of Eze itself dates back to 220 BC when the local population the 'Ezasques' settled and built a castle at the top of the rock of Eze. In 1706 during the Spanish wars, Louis XIV ordered the destruction of the castle to prevent it from becoming a threat to the French. Whilst the castle remained in ruins it was not forgotten, as the first tourists began to explore the French Riviera they made the difficult climb from the sea to the ruins of the castle, to enjoy the exceptional panoramic views. A business-minded local even set up a drink stand and this is how the castle ruins became the perfect location to build a garden.

In 1949 the Mayor of Eze, Andre Gianton, teamed up with the curator of Monaco's Exotic Garden, Jean Gastaud, to plant and develop the castle ruins - creating the Jardin Exotique d'Eze. The site, almost 500 meters above sea level, is well protected from the north winds by the Revère Plateau hills and the steep gradient of the rocky terrain offers good drainage, making the rock of Eze an ideal environment to grow succulents and mediterranean plants.

Making our way to the garden we wandered through the charming village of Eze, noting it's narrowly packed, ancient, winding streets. On arrival we were met by Head Gardener Mr Stephane Cassus and Frédéric Billy, Director of services for Eze. They were very welcoming and we were able to discuss the garden in detail, learning lots about the plants, design and history of the garden. The garden is split into two sections: The north side (redesigned in 2018) which consists mostly of mediterranean plants as this is the cooler, partially shaded side and the south side which is home to many plants from Central America and South Africa. For the whole garden they use a compost mix of soil, porous igneous rock and gravel, to aid draining for the dry loving plants.



Parodia leninghausii

As we walked through the garden, we were immediately amazed by the 360 degree views of the local area and beautiful vista to the bay of Eze, an incredible backdrop for the sculptural cacti, agave and aloes. We entered on the south side observing a very tall *Dasyliirion quadrangulatum* (Mexican grass tree) and a multi stemmed *Beaucarnea recurvata*. We couldn't believe the size of both of these plants. Having only experienced them under glass it was impressive to see how well they grow outside in their natural climate. We continued through a maze of twisting stairs with varying levels of terrace platforms, laying host to specimen planting, interwoven with creeping and trailing low growers.



Dasyliirion quadrangulatum



Yucca rostrata



Feijoa sellowiana

As we moved through to the north side Stephane explained the garden redesign, adding more tiered beds, pathways, view points for visitors to enjoy. As the garden is an important historical site they are always using natural surroundings as the basis for the design, planting into the rock face and using naturalised species that are commonly seen around the French Riviera such as *Strelitzia nicolai* and *Agave americana*, making the garden feel part of the landscape. We asked how they were able to get plants in the garden, due to difficult access to the site, many of these plants were transported via helicopter!

The dappled light and grotto on the north side provided a striking contrast to the heat and the bright light on the south side. A slow trickle of water through the dark cave provided a sanctuary for plants such as *Rhipsalis burchellii*, *Adiantum raddianum* and *Nephrolepis exaltata*, all of which framed nicely by *Acer palmatum*, *Dicksonia antarctica*, trailing rosemary and campanula.

Rhipsalis cassutha



Cephalocereus senilis



Ferocactus pilosu



Water features were an unexpected focal point for both sides of the garden, Stephane showed us how the natural looking waterfalls were designed with fiberglass rocks that had been carefully positioned in the garden and painted with a substance that encourages lichen and algae growth to make them seem more natural. Another part of this design achievement was how the water could be controlled and regulated via Stephans mobile phone.

The addition of small pools with water pumps on the south side worked to provide a cascading mist, allowing for a wider diversity of plants to be grown, such as papyrus, cycas palms and various species of fern, as well as providing some cooling relief for any visitors of the garden during the hot summer months.



Jacaranda mimosifolia



Washingtonia robusta



Bougainvillea spectabilis

Promenade du paillon

Whilst visiting Jardin Exotique d'Eze we stayed in Nice for one night, David Richter suggested we go and see Promenade du Paillon. A public park and garden also known as the "green corridor", it stretches 12 hectares and is located in the heart of Nice city centre. The park is home to plants from all over the world that thrive in the subtropical, mediterranean climates showcasing beautiful displays of trees and shrubs in flower.

There were so many notably impressive and sizeable tree specimens, not just in the Promenade du Paillon but throughout Nice and Menton. We experienced the intense honey tones of an avenue of flowering Tillia x europaea, a group of mature Schinus molle with its magnificent pendula foliage. We saw for the first time trees we'd only read about such as Geoffroea decorticans (the chañar tree - Northern Chile), Ficus macrophylla, Brachychiton roseus, Araucaria bidwillii and Callistemon citrinus (Australia). Therefore it only feels right to have a section dedicated to the plants and trees we encountered and documented in public areas of the Cote d'Azur.



Erythrina crista-gill



Senna didymobotrya



Capparis spinosa



Grevillea Banksii



Serre de la Madone

Serre de la Madone was created in 1924–1939 by Lawrence Johnston, who also created one of Britain’s most celebrated Art and Craft gardens; Hidcote Manor Garden in 1907. Hidcote, now owned by The National Trust, became the very model of a late-20th-century garden with its scaled down grandeur reflective garden rooms, thickly and luxuriously planted with rare and unusual plants Johnston had collected on many plant-hunting expeditions. Today, Hidcote’s plant collection still contains many species of national importance and the garden itself remains very popular. Contrary to Johnston’s ‘other’ garden, Serre la Madone, which was once considered the better garden of the two, with 12 gardeners to Hidcote’s 6, has now seemingly fallen into decline.

The story of Serre de la Madone started when Johnston bought the farmhouse and land which lies on a hillside in the Gorbio valley at the top of Menton in 1924. The Cote D’Azur’s frost-free climate made towns such as Nice, Monaco and Menton the ideal places to enjoy and settle over winter.

The site offers an excellent location for plants from subtropical regions so Johnston transformed the original farm land and house into a home and garden. As always on the Riviera, the natural topography determined the design of the garden; old olive terraces with strong dry stone walls already existed and so stairs, basins, fountains and statues were built, reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance. The garden was embellished and exploited with the same sense of theatre as Hidcote, whilst keeping traditional mediterranean features such as shaded seating areas, containers, gravel and stone. Johnston spent most of the year there and his summers at Hidcote until he retired to Serre de la Madone, where he died in 1958.

He passed the garden on to fellow garden designer Norah Lindsay and her bohemian daughter Nancy who instead of moving in to continue Johnstons work, sold the house and stripped the garden of its most valuable ornaments. Many plants, especially perennials, inevitably disappeared, while others were purchased by close friends and can apparently still be seen in surviving Menton gardens. In 1999, the Conservatoire du Littoral succeeded in acquiring Serre de la Madone and since then a process of extensive restoration has been ongoing using archives and Johnston’s travel diaries and photos. Today, the once magnificent private garden is now a public space owned by a non-profit charity and maintained by 3 gardeners.



“The French Riviera seemed a paradise promising fulfilment of extravagant desires, including some unacceptable to prevailing moral standards. It was, as W. Somerset Maugham put it so succinctly, ‘a sunny place for shady people’”

Louisa Jones from Lawrence Johnston’s Garden on the French Riviera



Nelumbo nucifera



Semele androgyna



■ Main garden	■ Water garden	■ Orangerie
■ Garden of collection	■ Plaza and garden	■ Terrace
■ Main pergola	■ Covered loggia	■ Terrace with garden
■ Garden 'wall'	■ Water cells	■ Terrace (lower garden)
■ Water garden	■ East-West garden	■ Terrace garden
■ Courtyard of houses	■ Wooded area (interior)	■ Old garden
■ Terrace	■ Wooded area	

The garden is not well sign posted so we missed it the first time, we entered through the tiny car park and into a small shop where we were given a comprehensive map and told there were no gardeners there to meet us, so we proceeded, map in hand, to explore the garden ourselves.

Upon entry we were met by two stone pillars, encased in jasmine, creating a gateway to the first of the 'green rooms'. Inside a circular fish pond overgrown by *Nymphaea alba*, heralded by two *Washingtonia robusta* upon which *Semele androgyna* reached most of the way up. Nearby the ruins of an old orangery can be seen, and the pathway through to the next room is signposted by a majestic *Podocarpus macrophylla*. Our first impressions were that of the jungles in southeast asia.

Pathways led to ascending crumbling steps, shaded by the high canopies of the podocarpus and the lower canopy of *Oreopanax epemesnilianus*, *Cocculus laurifolius* and *Diospyros eriantha*. Amongst the understory were more beautiful shades of green ground cover in the form of *vinca major*, *Woodwardia radicans* and *Crinum moorei*. We followed steps to a pergola engulfed by clematis, begonia and wisteria, that runs nearly the entire length of the garden.



Dasyliiron serratifolium



Aechmea gamosepala



Cycad debeonensis



After wandering (getting lost) down dusty dappled pathways lined with old stone walls with *Aloe arborescens*, *Aloe striata*, *Aeonium arborescens* growing out of the cracks, we found the 'Formal' garden, echoing the English garden with a lawn bordered with a just surviving box hedge. Adjacent to the box hedging stood *Acacia linifolia*, *Arbutus canariensis* and *Nolina longifolia*, all very large specimens, obviously part of the original planting. Our favourite of these large specimens was *N. longifolia* native to Mexico, because of its mature fissured bark and weeping foliage, considering this is a very slow growing plant the specimen at in Serre de La Madone was huge!

Grevillea robusta



Leaving the lower levels of the garden, we reached the central, largest terrace where the garden feels more open with a view of the house and in the background are two large *Pinus pinea* towering above it. A noticeably strong vertical line of successive flights of stairs runs down from the house through the garden joining the different levels together. Here, there are two large pools with urns along the edges, a statue of a woman in the middle of one of the pools with a backdrop of *Cyperus papyrus* and *Nelumbo nucifera*. The essence of the design of the ponds was to create a feeling of openness, no trees were planted around them so that the immensity of the sky would be captured by the reflections of the water. Unfortunately the water is more green than clear but still gives a feel for the original design and the serenity Johnston was trying to achieve.



Pinus pinea



Nolina longifolia



Anigozanthos flavidus



Leonotis leonurus

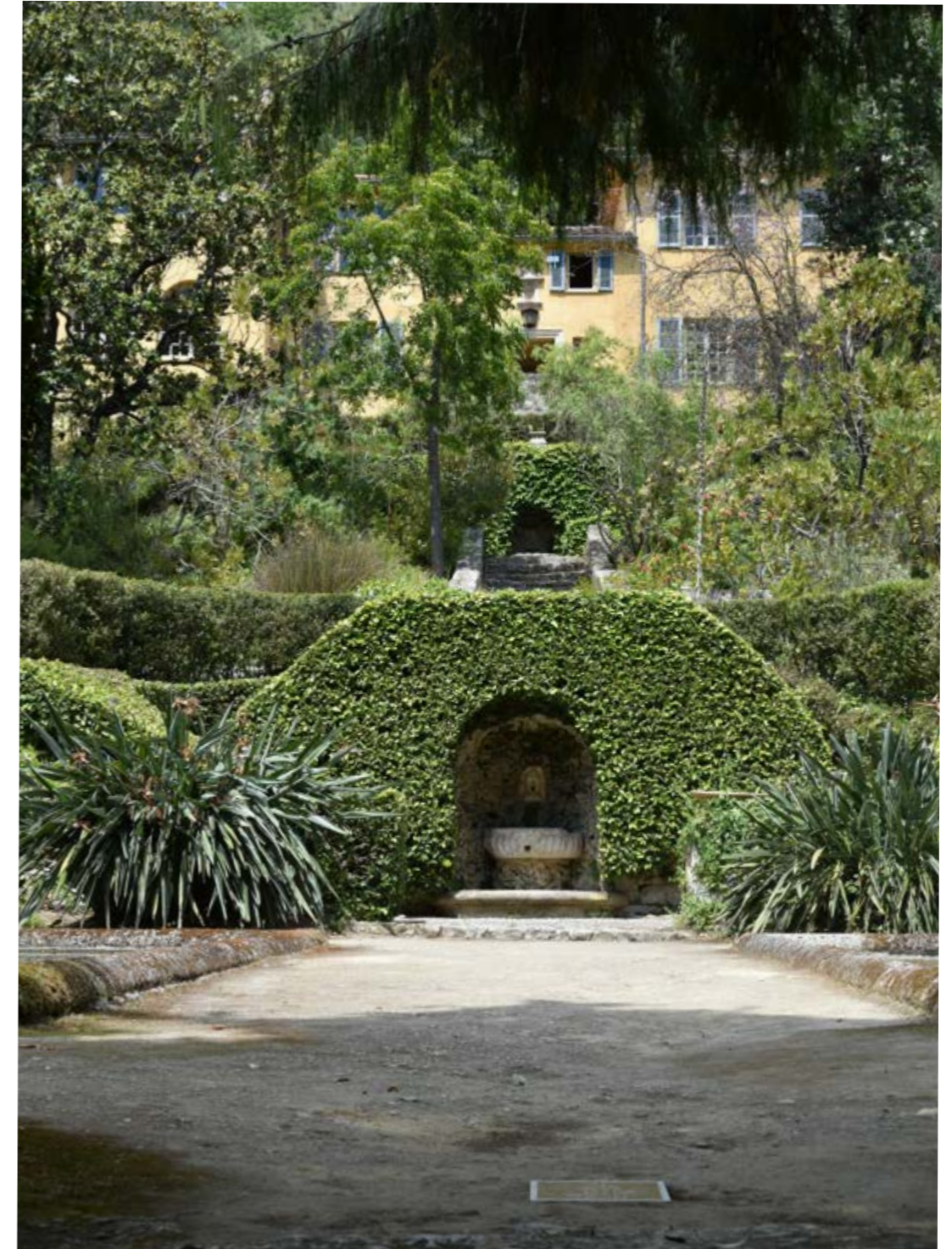


Leucospermum cordifolium



Lobeila laxiflora

The climbing terraces towards the house consist of plants from S.Africa, Australia and New Zealand, this included Protea, Banksia, Leucadendron, Leucospermum and many more. Although the terraces were a little overgrown and perhaps needed some attention, the plan was clear - to treat each level differently, grouping the plants by horticultural families and countries of origin.

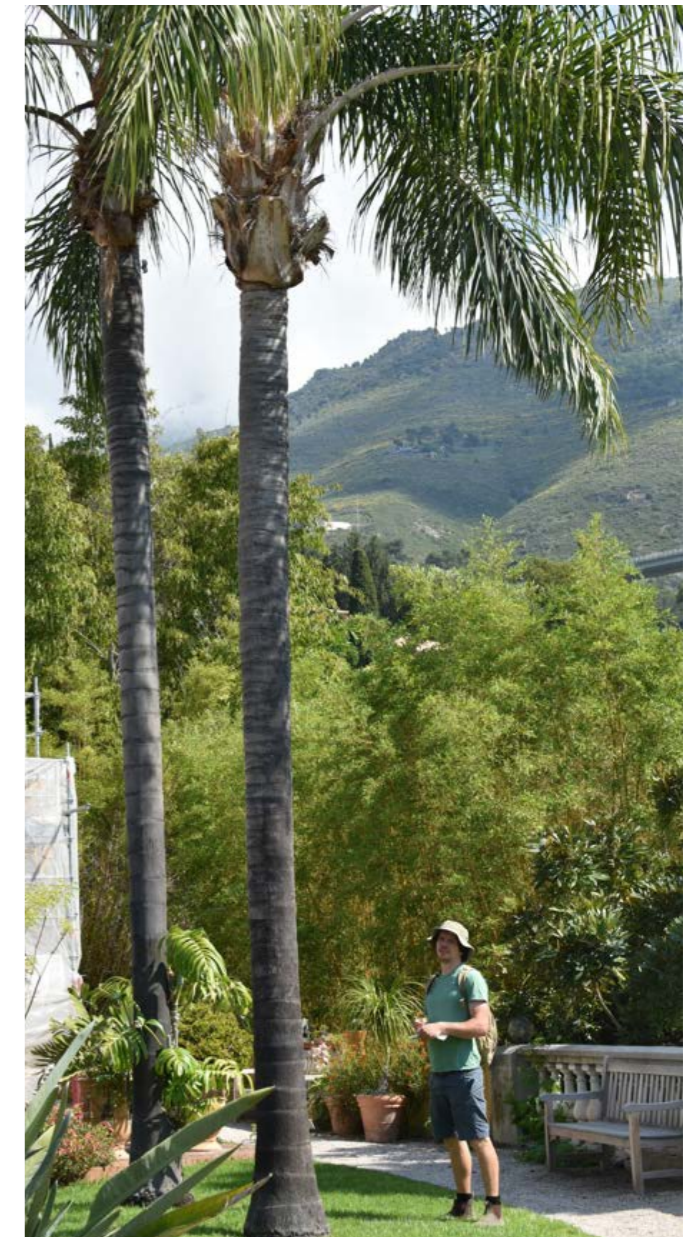




Jardin Botanique Val Rahmeh

Situated a short walk from the centre of Menton are the inspiring and diverse botanical gardens of Val Rahmeh and the beautiful Italian Provencal style villa that lies at its heart. Formally a Potager called "Cherry tree villa" covering an area of about 1 hectare, it was bought by Lord Percy Radcliff in 1905 and named after his late wife Rahmeh. Radcliff transformed the once agricultural land into a "garden of rooms" specifically compartmentalised biogeographically in accordance with micro climates of temperature, humidity and varying levels of drainage in the soil. The estate was sold in 1957 to May Bud Campbell, an eccentric English plant enthusiast, who continued to add unique and rare plants, the property also became a venue, Campbell welcomed local public figures and her many English acquaintances from the Coast.

We had a brief meeting with Head Gardener Stephan on the terrace of the villa who explained to us the history of the garden and how Campbell had gone bankrupt and so was forced to sell to the state which is why the property and garden are now being managed by the Cote d'Azur Natural History Museum. The museum run workshops and classes in the garden and are working to promote and support education within horticulture.



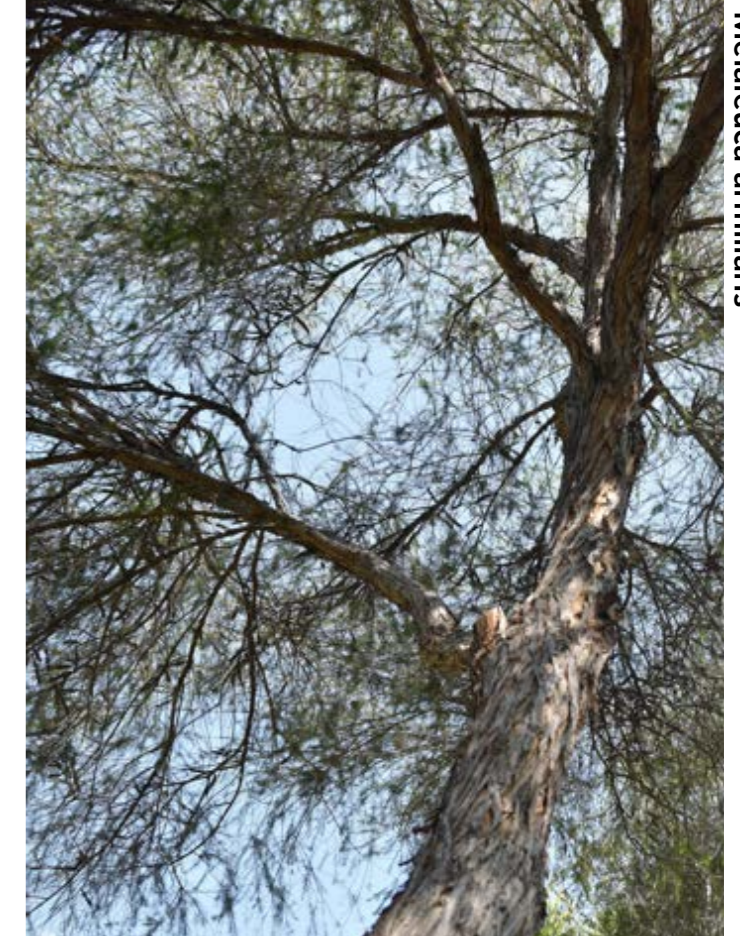
Sycragus romanzofianum

The first view of the garden was looking down from a terrace at the top, from here you could see the lower levels of the garden including a large pond, tops of mature trees and sea in the distance. The terrace surrounded by stone balustrades gave us an immediate feel of a formal 17th century (French influenced) English garden. Four small lawns were bordered excellently by *Liorpe muscari* as parterre hedging in a symmetrical design with four *Strelitzia reginae* as the centrepiece. Cascading over the terrace balustrade and down the wall to the floor were a *Thunbergia grandiflora* "clock vine" and a *Solandra hartwegii* which gave a fascinating contrast to the usual climbing form of vines. This was most probably planted by Campbell who had a keen interest in the Solaneace family, earning her the nickname 'Miss Daturas'.



Encephalartos lehmannii

The pathway along this hedge led us through to 2 glass houses used for propagation with large beds with interwoven pathways that laid host to a range of medicinal and cultural plants, such as aloe vera for skin treatment, and *Catha edulis* or 'khat', used as a mild stimulant. It was here we learnt about *Sophora toromiro*, a tree endemic to a volcanic crater on Easter Island in Chile, that was rapidly deforested by the native people to the point where in 1917, only one tree was left standing. A Norwegian explorer called Thor Heyerdahl picked the fruit and propagated the plant from seed. It is thought that trees found today in European botanic gardens are all descended from this one specimen.



Melaleuca armillaris

Liorpe muscari



Bauhinia grandiflora

The next part of the garden boasts a *Bauhinia grandiflora* (not in flower unfortunately) laying host to a range of epiphytic plants such as *Tillandsia usneoides* (spanish moss) and *Achmea fasciata*. We also noted different species of *Tradescantia* growing as ground cover in the beds whereby in England we might use *vinca minor*. On the opposite side to this courtyard we saw a strikingly English scene, this time in the form of a cloud prune topiary hedge made from *Cupressus sempervirens*. No doubt regularly and recently trimmed, the scales had become knitted together to give a solid appearance to the large, continuous hedge that undulated in width and height. We loved this design.



Senna artemisioides



Erythrostemon gilliesii



Cieba speciosa



Following on the pathway through a shading tunnel of yucca gloriosa all of a sudden we found ourselves in a spectacular rainforest environment. All of the trees, many of which unfortunately would not survive an English winter, have reached a great height with varying layers of the canopy with *Ceroxylon parvifrons*, *Brachytriton acerfolium* and *Archontopheonix cunninghamiana*. Interwoven with climbing plants such as *Philiodendron pongi pamiantum* and *Monstera deliciosa* climbing high up into the canopy, It was amazing to see *M. deliciosa* established outside and mimicking its natural growing habit in the tropical rainforests of Mexico. The scene was a nice contrast to the more manicured areas of the garden and was a perfect example of natural forests in humid tropical regions. Val Rahmeh's Average temperature in around 16 degree centigrade with 316 days of sunshine, stephen the head gardener told us their last frost was in 2005 when it got as low as -2 degree C however the overall humidity never falls below 58%.



Brachytriton acerfolium



Rhapis humilis blume



Philiodendron pongi pamiantum



Brugmansia arborea



Dracaena draco



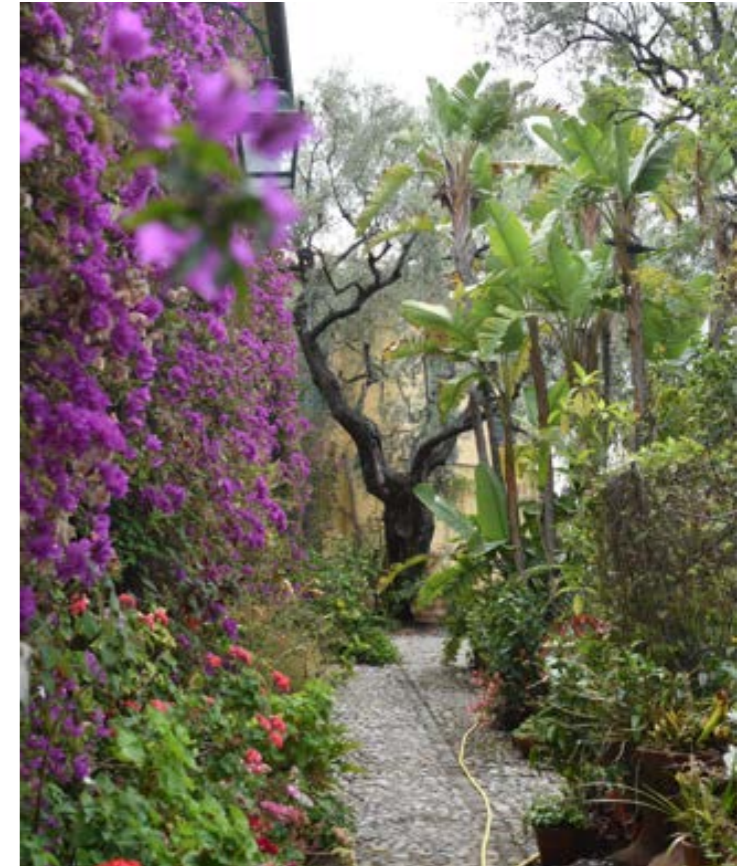
Platycerium bifurcatum

Villa Boccanegra

Next we crossed the border into Italy, close to Latte, to visit the private garden, Boccanegra, which made a pleasant change from the formalities of the gardens we had visited thus far. Our host for the day, Ursula, was a warm and welcoming lady who had a wonderful way of talking about her plants and the landscape in which they lie.

The land was originally an agricultural dwelling but in 1906 was bought by Miss Ellen Wilmott who at the time had 3 other gardens; Warley Place in Essex, Tresserve in the French Alps and Boccanegra in the Italian Riviera. Wilmott was one of the leading gardeners and plant hunters of her day. In 1897, she was awarded the Royal Horticultural Society's Victoria Medal of Honour, a sign of how much her work was admired in an industry heavily populated by men. Today, there are many plants named after her such as *Ceratostigma willmottianum*, *Corylopsis willmottiae* and even a species of *Eryngium*. This particular variety is known as *Eryngium giganteum* 'Miss Willmott's Ghost', after the nineteenth-century gardener, who apparently liked to secretly scatter seeds of the plant in other people's gardens to sabotage their designs!

At Boccanegra Miss Wilmot left all the existing olive trees and introduced many new species of plants and trees, often trading with Hanbury gardens only a short distance away. In 1923 the plot was sold to John Treymane; a military man whose family owned the Heligan estate and were involved in creating the now known 'The Lost Gardens of Heligan'. The garden continued to change hands until In 1983 it was inherited by Guido Piacenza and his wife Ursula Piacenza who shared a passion for preserving and developing the garden. To this day over 4000 different species of plant have been protected and accumulated including a wide selection of aloes and south african pelargoniums.



Agave filifera



Ursula's balcony was bursting with pots containing mainly varying species of orchid, pelargonium, succulent, begonia, and roses. As she watered her pelargoniums we could see immediately how important this collection of plants were to her, taking the time to tell us about each species she has managed to grow outside given the heat.

As we walked down the path to the first part of the garden Ursula told us about the various pests she has problems with in the garden such as Paysandisia arbon, a moth whose larvae feed on trunks and stems, specifically affecting exotic and native palm trees. Rhynchophorus ferrugineus, also known as red palm weevil, a beetle also affecting palm trees and Aloes.

We came across no doubt the largest Agave we had seen up close, a striking Agave francosini, 60 years old, 3 times the age of the average, and just this year flowering with a giant flower spike easily reaching 25 to 30 foot tall. Ursula was sad that it would now start to die away, but accepted it as part of the life cycle of the monocarpic Agaves. She plans to cut the leaves away with a chainsaw before the insect Scyphophorus acupunctatus (agave weevil) has a chance to infest it.



Agave francosinii



Echinopsis

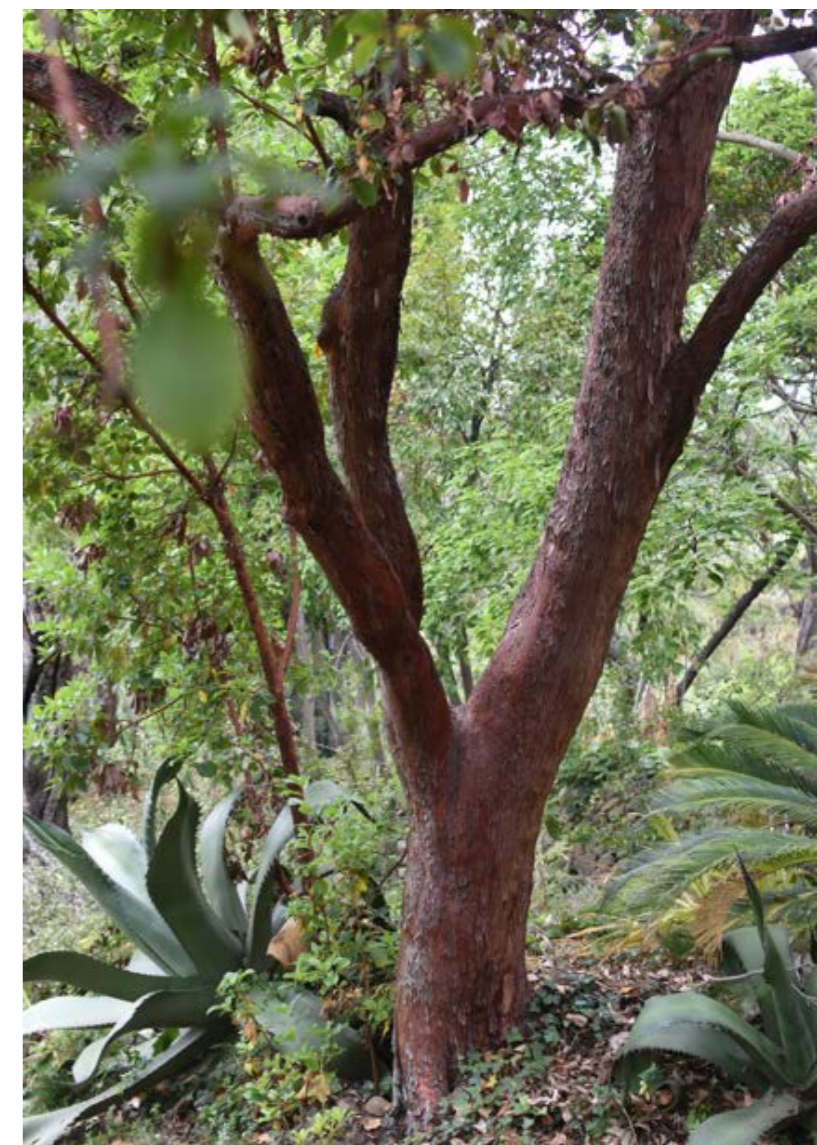
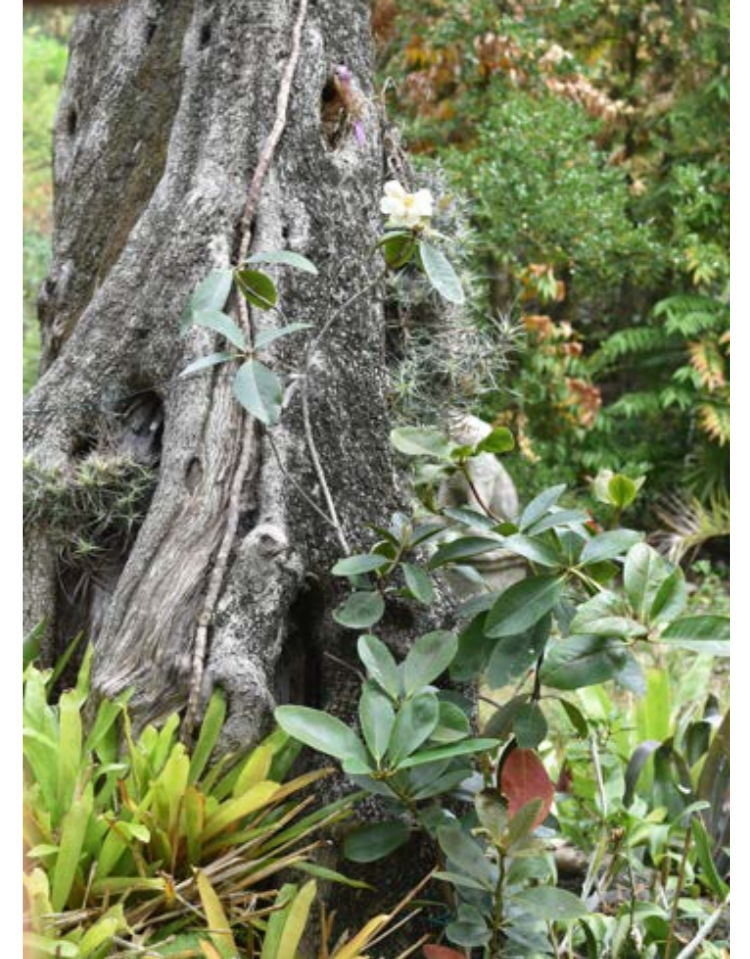
The garden is on a steep cliff that uses the original olive terrace as its topography, with stocky, gnarled olive 400 year old trees (*Olea europaea*) studded throughout, a nod to its past. This was part of Willmott's vision. The terraces are host to a range of plants such as bromeliads guzmania and achmea, others like *Justicia*, *Gesneria* and *Duranta repens*. As well as some more familiar genera *Rhododendron vireya*, *Hellabores* and *Anemone*. Most areas felt quite wild, except for a small overgrown formal garden with *teucrium* hedging and tall *cupressus sempervirens*. Two of our favourite specimen trees were a huge *Agatis Robusta* and *Arbutus x andrachnoides* with its cinnamon bark, the hybrid strawberry-tree is the result of a cross between *Arbutus andrachne* and *Arbutus unedo*, It is a naturally occurring hybrid. Both are important and rare trees for the garden.



Olea europaea



Epiphyllum



Arbutus x andrachnoides



We then made our own way to the bottom terraces to her glass house, close to the sea. It was filled almost entirely with small propagated plants of *Adenium obesum*. Ursula adores this plant very much, and it is easy to see why, however she has tried many times to allow it to survive outside but with no success. She tells us she will keep trying, and she certainly has enough plants to try many different positions within the garden. Unsure whether it is the changing weather conditions, Ursula tells us how the past 2 years have been without enough rain that is needed for the garden to grow. They therefore are leaving all the fallen leaves from trees and the dead leaves from the previous years herbaceous perennials to shade the ground and retain as much moisture as possible and to provide organic matter back to the soil.

Adenium obesum



Strophanthus speciosus



Hanbury Gardens

Hanbury Botanical gardens in Ventimiglia, Italy - no more than 5 minutes down the road from Villa Boccanegra - stretches 18 hectares from the road to the sea on Cape Mortola. In 1867 the land was purchased by Thomas Hanbury an English businessman, gardener and philanthropist. Thomas and his Brother Daniel Hanbury, a Botanist and Pharmacologist, set out to transform Mortola into an 'acclimatisation garden' for exotic plants.

The brothers found, bought and traded plants from remote corners of the globe, Thomas had strong connections with other botanic gardens worldwide and so many plants also came from Kew, Montpellier university and Barcelona Botanical Garden. The collection of S. African, Australian and American plants attracted the scientific world and were the subject of pharmacological research. Architects and botanical experts, all of international standards came to visit, even Queen Victoria and her nobles came to experience the gardens and Liguria coast. This changed Hanbury from being just a garden of rare plants to an institute where people could learn plants and study the environment.

After Thomas' death and the I World War in 1907 the gardens were handed to Cecil, Thomas' eldest son and his wife Dorothy. They continued to edit the garden slowly and cultivated scientific relationships with botanical gardens from all over the world, exchanging specimens and seeds, and embellishing Hanbury with new and exciting species. During World War II the building was occupied by Italian and German soldiers, by then the gardens began to deteriorate and Cecil had died. Despite Dorothy's best efforts to rebuild she could not support the work financially, so she sold the land to the Italian state and now it is owned by University of Genoa.



Strelitzia regina



Arriving at the gates of Hanbury, we were keen to explore the garden and meet Carolyn Hanbury. Carolyn is the wife of Thomas Hanbury's great grandson, and she kindly invited us for lunch and to share her story of the garden. Carolyn's house is situated in the gardens and has been in the family since the gardens were created. She served us a delicious spread on her picturesque, wisteria-covered patio, where we had a spectacular view down to the gardens and the sea.

Carolyn shared old photographs of her family and lots of details about the vibrant history of the gardens and the characters who helped create them. In particular, she remembers Dorothy Hanbury, also known within the family as Dodo, a strong but tense woman who the gardens have a lot to thank for. She also told us of the garden's connection with Wisley, Thomas Hanbury had bought Wisley just before he died and gifted the garden to the Royal Horticultural Society, this was to be the RHS' first and largest garden project.

Although Carolyn is not a gardener she takes great pride in supporting her late husband's vision and continuing the family legacy. She is a facilitator and ambassador of the gardens and wants to help promote it. She believes the key to the development and growth of the garden are gardeners who love their work and the University of Genoa continuing to create Thomas Hanbury's acclimatisation garden for subtropical plants. We felt honored to be welcomed into Carolyn's home and talk openly about the garden then and now. We especially enjoyed Carolyn's english wit and matter-of-fact attitude, it reminded us of home.



There are currently 9 Gardeners employed by the state but no Head Gardener. Carolyn suggested that this has affected the garden which has lost a sense of personal touch, as my mainly just provide maintenance. This showed in the lack of young plants and lots of empty space between original planting, the glasshouse also seemed as though it was not being used to full potential, certainly not like when the Hanbury brothers owned the garden.



Punica granatum



Euphorbia tirucalli



Cussonia paniculata



Lochroma grandiflora





Justicia brandegeana



We found the garden to be partly cultivated with plants coming from Mediterranean climate zones; Med Basin, California, Chile, South Africa, Australia. With dusty pathways winding down to the sea and impressive landscaped areas scattered throughout, including the main palazzo terrace, a follie-like monument called the Templetto and Mauresque Mausoleum where Thomas Hanbury is buried. The garden also features a few fountains, we enjoyed the view from the main dragon fountain which sits and the top of the descending pathway bordered by *Cupressus sempervirens*, this top section of the garden felt reminiscent of its original design and is where most of the exotic and specimen planting lies. The rest of the garden is occupied by spontaneous Mediterranean vegetation, arboreal and shrub.



Brachycton rupestris



43 *Romneya coulteri*



Calodendrum capense





Jardins du MIP

Musée International de la Parfumerie

10 km southwest of Grasse on the edge of the Mouans-Sartoux village lies Les Jardin du International de la Parfumerie. Originally created as a public garden by the city council in 2007, it ran for three years as a non profit organisation before it was bought in 2010 by the Musée International de la Parfumerie (MIP). In the same year Head Gardener Christoph Mege joined the team, first as assistant gardener, then working his way up to managing the whole garden. Christoph was our guide for the day and immediately came across as very jolly and happy to give us as much time as possible to walk around the garden with him.



Tilia henryana



The plants at MIP are grouped according to their fragrance, fragrance plants and perfume plants. A fragrance is defined as a combination of organic compounds that produces a distinct smell or odour, whereas a perfume is a liquid mixture used to emit a pleasant odour. In this garden no chemicals are used and all the compost is made on site with an added import of sheep and horse manure. As we began the tour we noticed immediately the very natural and hands-off maintenance style to the garden; various self seeders had been left to grow, a small *Ficus benjamina* grew out the untrimmed box hedges that bordered the beds. Christoph said It would be easier for him to just cut it all down than to leave it looking like this, while we were able to appreciate that was true, we couldn't help but want to see the parterre without the tree growing in it.

However, it was made clear that the garden does not exist to be aesthetically pleasing in a traditional manner. Another benefit of being chemical free and allowing plants to grow more freely became apparent by the abundance of wildlife, we had never seen so many bugs and beetles, moths and butterflies in such a small space, the garden was alive with humming and dancing of insects. One beetle was particularly prolific, a species of *Labidostomis*, a flying orange beetle that feeds on the foliage of many deciduous shrubs and young trees. In some cases it had already decimated entire plants. Christoph chuckled as he said "They tend to eat everything, but don't worry, all the leaves grow back next year". He really gave us inspiration to work as much as possible with anything considered a 'pest' by allowing or introducing other biological controls to bring natural balance to the garden.



Vachelia karroo

Acacia covenyi



As we walked around we were encouraged to take a leaf of each plant we came across and rub it between our fingers and enjoy the scents. When we compared what we could smell we were surprised that on many occasions each individual description was different to the other. We took a special interest in the fragrant plants that could be grown in the UK. These included 2 species of mint; *Mentha suaveolens* which had aromas of pineapple or apple, and *Mentha pulegium* which is actually a British native with a spearmint fragrance that is useful as a home insecticide and mosquito repellent.

There was a great collection of Acacia trees which was helpful in identifying and learning different species within what we consider to be a difficult genus. Two species of which stood out among others; *Acacia karoo* (now called *Vachellia karoo*), with its 3 inch long spines and Fabaceae like foliage and *Acacia x hanburyana*, a hybrid between *A. Dealbata* and *A.podalyriifolia*, a natural hybrid from Hanbury gardens.



Houttuynia cordata



Avena fatua



Poncirus trifoliata



Graphosoma italicum - Beetle



A large portion of the garden was reserved for neat rows of lavender, consisting of 3 different types; *lavandula angustifolia*, *lavandula latifolia*, and the hybrid between the two *Lavandula x Intermedia* known as "Lavandin". The rose garden consisted entirely of briars and dog roses, the main species being *Rosa santifolia*, *R. gallica*, *R. domestica* and *R. canina*, unfortunately we were a little late to see these flowering. There is a grove of lemon trees at the top of the garden with a species of orange, *Poncirus trifoliata*, which has been used as the rootstock for all the lemon trees in the grove, they are grafted on to this due to its hardiness against the winter frosts. Close by at the boundary of the garden we saw a typical French countryside theme, a traditional haystack was sat near some seats in the shade, where swathes of wild oat *Avena fatua* replaced the specimen planting. Christophe wanted a space where the garden celebrated the land's history and educated visitors on its original purpose as an oat field.



Megascolia maculata flavifrons - Wasp



Lavandula x intermedia



Aloysia citrodora

Caussols



Caussols is a mountain range in the Maritime Alps, in the Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur region, about 20 kilometers north of Grasse and at an altitude of almost 900 metres. The landscape here varies from rugged shrub mountains, dense pine forest, gorges and valleys. Caussols boasts an exceptional environment whereby Alpine and Mediterranean climate zones exist, as a result it is home to a third of French flora with over 2000 plant species.

We didn't have much planned other than going on a walk in search of wild plants. We soon discovered finding plants wasn't going to be difficult, on our drive up into the mountains we came across many flowers growing in rocky crevices and verges with limited soil, by the roadside.



Thymus serpyllum



Lactuca perennis



Petrosedum sediforme



Helichrysum stoechas



Echium vulgare



Cistus albidus



We embarked on our walk into the mountain noticing many more species of wild familiar and new flowers, shrubs and trees. The trail took us along and up the side of the mountain with breathtaking views of the valley below. At the top we reached Plateau Cavern and the CERGA Observatory, a scientific department and astronomical station. Plateau Cavern is the highest point of the Caussols, a ridge that flattens out at the top of the mountains, it's mostly made from limestone. Up here the clouds hung low and sometimes so thick we couldn't see but the wind moved the cloud quickly - quick enough for us to spot an abundance of *Anacamptis pyramidalis* - pyrimid orchid.

We found this part of the trip to be very rewarding and exciting as we didn't know what to expect or what we might find, the maritime alps are a very special place, full of life.



Sempervivum calcareum



Rosa canina



Dactylorhiza fuchsii

Anacamptis pyramidalis



Helianthemum nummularium



Polygala vulgaris



Lavandula angustifolia



Salvia pratensis



Coronilla minima



Pinus sylvestris



Globularia cordifolia



Gorge du Loup

Gorge du loup is one of many rivers running through the maritime alps, this fast flowing river is set deep in a sedimentary and limestone canon, with many undulating paths adjacent to waterfalls. We managed to enjoy a short walk along the gorge before torrential rain hit and we had to abandon our mission. Whilst enjoying the scenery of Gorge du loup we noted a few native trees such as elms, alders, hornbeams and laurels, protecting the undergrowth of wildflowers from the sun. The gorge was very lush and green and reminded us of the Teign valley in Dartmoor with its large granite boulders and winding river encased by native trees.



Ficus carica

Ostrya carpinifolia



Campanula rotundifolia

Spartium junceum



As our trip drew to a close, we drove through the Côte d'Azur and back towards Marseilles. On route we decided to take a detour via Massif de l'Esterel which is a mediterranean mountain range located right next to the sea, the rock is made from silica-rich, igneous rock which gives it its striking red colour. We were surprised to see such dramatic mountains with ravens and forests so close to the sea. As we drove through the middle we found ourselves engulfed in an evergreen oak forest of *Quercus suber*, it was incredible to see such mature specimens en masse. Many of the *Q.suber* had been harvested for their corky bark, although these trees are not totally resilient to having their bark removed as it means losing significant water and becoming more susceptible to pathogens. They are surprisingly able to heal and regenerate bark. *Q.Suber* are usually ready for first harvest twenty-five years after planting and can be harvested every 12 years. The bark should only be removed by a skilled forester with the correct tools, and at the right time of year to avoid further stress within the tree. The Portuguese Cork Association reports that the longevity and structural persistence of cork oak trees helps to support high floral and faunal biodiversity.

Bituminaria bituminosa



Centaurium erythraea



Our Conclusions

(glory period)

1661 - 1700	Versailles, André Le Nôtre
1867 - 1950	Hanbury gardens, Thomas & Daniel Hanbury, Cecil & Dorothy Hanbury
1906 - 1923 - today	Villa Boccanegra, Ellen Willmott, Piacenza family of Biella, Ursula
1905 - 1966 - today	Val Rahmeh, Lord Percy Radcliff, then, May Bud Campbell
1924 - 1958	Serre de la madone, Lawrence Johnston
1945 - today	Jardin Exotique D'Eze, André Gianton & Jean Gastaud, Stephane Cassus

Visiting the Palace of Versailles as our first stop was important in understanding the influence that France had on the English landscape architects of the 17th and 18th century.

During the renaissance period ideas of gardening were changed and influenced by rediscovered classical ideals of virtue and beauty. Instead of cultivating land just for food Europeans began to create gardens for pleasure and contemplation; for the enjoyment of sights, sounds and smells. Initially inspired by the Italian renaissance garden, France began creating restful and recreational gardens but with more control over nature and increased grandeur and space. These formal French gardens were also known as *jardin à la française*.

Versailles is a grand exhibition of the *jardin à la française* with its imposed symmetrical and orderly style on nature. With features such as embroidery parterres, topiary and formal avenues of trees helping to create long views and highlighting the architecture of the palace.

The value of a long distance view can not be denied, just like the Grand Canal of Versailles, a body of water and light stretching as far as the eye can see. Scale and perspective like this can satisfy a spiritual urge, helping us to feel part of something bigger and it definitely gave us a sense of expansiveness, as if anything was possible.

In French formal design the chateau is at the center symbolising power and success but the gardens retain their beauty even when viewed from afar. Plants near the palace were planted low whereas plants further from the main architecture had paths edged with trees, fountains and pools of water, reflecting the symmetry of the green landscape.

In surveying the gardens of the Cote d'Azur created during the 19th and 20th century we were able to see how these influences were reintroduced to France and developed further through the lens of the English horticultural style of the time.

The 18th and 19th Century were times of dramatic change for the English gardens. Designers and Architects had been inspired by the idealised landscape of antiquity until a less formal, labor-intensive and expensive approach was explored. Many started to appreciate a more natural and relaxed idea of gardening, parkland views with grass, serpentine lakes, natural tree compositions and long drives replaced the formal French garden. Whilst keeping the styles of Charles Bridgeman and 'Capability' Brown, the English garden style progressed and revived formal flower gardens, terraces near the house and long borders with exuberant, colourful planting and pergolas covered with climbing plants.



Calodendrum capense



Hildewintera colademononis

The gardens we visited along the Cote d'Azur weave together a rich tapestry of styles and influences, from the symmetrical formality and grandeur of the French Baroque to the illusions of untamed wilderness and tranquility of the English landscapes. Prominent garden designers and writers of the time; Gertude Jekyll and William Robinson would have been important influencers for garden curators like Lawrence Johnston of Serre de la Madone and Hidcote, who, like many of the curators of these gardens, were real plant enthusiasts and followed garden fashions of the time.

It's also important to acknowledge the social status of these garden curators, who were only able to experiment and create such impressive gardens because of their wealth and position in society. This must have been a very exciting time in horticulture, the 20th century saw an explosion of innovation and interest in gardening and plants. Exotic species were being collected and swapped from all over the world and planted in gardens such as Hanbury where science, philosophy, and gardening intersected creating a horticultural institution.

The location of the Cote d'Azur on the mediterranean coast is a gateway between Europe and Africa, its climate allows for a wide arrange of tropical and subtropical plants from Australia, New Zealand, S. Africa and S. America to be grown and thrive. Adding a touch of exotic allure to its gardens; palms, succulents, orchids, and bromeliads from distant regions invoke a sense of mystery and intrigue which transports visitors to a world beyond the Mediterranean.

Many of the gardens we visited were designed based on the topography of the land which meant dramatic locations and views of borrowed landscape. Stone played an important part in all the gardens we saw, its presence created space between plantings replacing lawns and grassy banks. The stone and gravel reminded us of Dartmoor granite which plays a similar role in our local surroundings and gardens.

Boccanegra is a terraced garden because it was originally an olive grove by the sea, similarly to Hanbury only a 3.4km away which also leads down to the sea. Hanbury, the oldest of the gardens we visited on the Cote d'Azur, built upon difficult terrain composed mostly of limestone which is easily eroded by rain water and sea winds. The Hanbury brothers were able to manipulate the soil texture and irrigation in order to be able to grow ericaceous plants from England such as Azaleas and Hydrangeas. This innovative approach to soil science and landscaping is very impressive to us as gardeners today.

Jardin Exotique d'Eze is the highest point in the village replacing the traditional location of a church or community space. Set into the ancient ruins of the castle, the garden is very much at the centre and celebrates the spirit and history of Eze. The garden experience has been carefully thought out and the navigation is very well designed, making the most out of the space, creating optimum viewpoints and photo opportunities for the visitor. In contrast to Serre de la Madone which gave a feeling of being engulfed by and lost in the overgrown garden. The space has a wonderful structure; a series of contrasting intimate rooms with pools, fountains, pergolas and classical sculpture with a main stepped central axis running from top to bottom. We learnt that irrigated lawns are not commonplace in this region of France, so for Serre de la Madone to have a very small but dry lawn was still quite impressive to see, this must have been a part of the original design. The garden is very much the focal point with the building (Johnstons home) being the final and highest point to reach in the journey.

The layout of Jardin Botanique Val Rahmeh was an interesting contrast to the ascending approach to the main villa at Serre de la Madone which was only seen at the end of our visit whereas at Val Rahmeh we entered the villa and its terrace to access the garden; perhaps this symbolised Campbell's aristocratic stature and desire to entertain people in her garden, whereas Johnston from readings comes across as a more solitary character. The tropical forest environment at Val Rahmeh evokes memories of trips to the tropics and the maturity and sheer scale of the trees in this section of the garden was amazing to see.

The Jardin du MIP was the most recognisable to us with a flat aspect surrounded by hills and farmland. Observing its neighboring fields we were able to see the difference between its original use for growing oats compared to its current cultivation for nature and scent. The garden is managed to be biodiverse and wild, leaving undisturbed corners creating a wildlife haven.

Being granted an audience with the Head Gardeners or guardians was crucial for learning first hand about the rich history of the gardens. We learnt how each garden has a different approach to the way it is run and whether it is managed by the state, by a museum, or being privately owned, it is clear that the importance of keeping these gardens alive is not understated. We realise how fortunate we are to be gardening in the UK, with education and support from institutes like the National Trust and RHS, who save and promote gardens which have been lost or fallen into disrepair.

Serre de la Madone has been without a guardian for many years. We thought that because the plants had been left to grow naturally in many areas, it gave the garden a sense of history and charm. Established gardens can often be improved by lack of maintenance through increased biodiversity and natural adaptations to changes in the environment. However, we did think there were some missed opportunities to improve certain areas of the garden that had become overgrown and would have benefitted from some maintenance. Unfortunately, the lack of funding and gardeners makes it hard to restore this garden back to its former glory but its evolution should still be recognised and appreciated all the same.

Jardin Botanique Val Rahmeh is now run by Museum d'natural d'histoire and has a strong educational element, with labels for all plants, sign-posts with information and an extensive audio guide. This was a very different experience to the private garden, Villa Boccanegra where we were able to walk around the garden with owner Ursula Piacenza. Ursula's garden really is a personal labour of love, with so much history she is preserving the past and editing for the future. A modern day plants woman, who enjoys experimenting with propagation. Carolyn Hanbury and Ursula are great friends and share a love of the gardens they have inherited.

Meeting Carolyn was one of the highlights of our trip, we were able to get a more in depth insight into the garden, the family and Carolyn's thoughts on where it is today. We feel it's important that Carolyn and the Hanbury family continue to be a part of this garden and its story, as this is rare with gardens today. This garden became the driver of all other gardens along the Italian and French Riviera and served as the model for all other garden designers like Lawrence Johnston and Ellen Wilmott. However it seems to have lost this pioneering element to the garden, with no head gardener we can see the garden is lacking the direction needed to manage such a large space.

Finally, this study tour has been an amazing experience and excellent education on the history of French and English gardens, providing us with further knowledge of planting structures and themes which are key in influencing modern gardening and in turn will benefit our garden design choices. We have been able to recognise the culture and artistry that makes British horticulture so widely recognised and expand our understanding of native and naturalised plants and trees in cultivated and wilder regions of the French alps and coastline.



Plant List

List of plants with potential to tolerate the changing weather conditions and hardy enough to experiment growing in the UK.

Butia capitata native to Brazil and one of the hardiest feather palms, tolerating temperatures down to -10°C or slightly below. Beautiful glaucous pinnate leaves makes for a classy palm, definite potential to be grown in the UK.

Feijoa sellowiana native to South and Central America, an easy to grow, hardy shrub boasting beautiful pink flowers in June with protruding stamens and anthers, the flowers are edible and taste sweet like marshmallows. This shrub is known to survive UK temperatures but doesn't fruit (pineapple guava) however this could change given the recent changes to our climate.

Nolina longifolia also known as Mexican tree grass, is drought tolerant and hardy down to -8 (+?) Very slow growing with a dense crown of long graceful flowing leaves finely serrated. Evergreen. Forms a stout trunk with corky bark. Easy to grow as they like full sun/partial shade and exposed/sheltered, however water sparingly in winter, only enough to keep the leaves from wilting. It doesn't like the cold so it could be started in a pot which is moved inside during winter.

Vitex agnus-castus the chaste tree, is a deciduous shrub native to the Mediterranean region. It is known for its fragrant, blue-purple flowers and its peppery scent. It can withstand temperatures down to -15°C. However, the plant may be damaged by frost, especially in colder parts of England. A sheltered location with well-drained soil and plenty of sunlight is key.

Phylica ericoides a compact, bushy evergreen shrub endemic to S. Africa. Its foliage is very similar to the heather grown in Devon, they are often used in similar positions growing out of walls. *Phylica ericoides* can survive temperatures down to -7°C and enjoys well drained acidic soils which we can provide in Dartmoor. It will need to be protected by other plants or a microclimate pocket in the garden to thrive and provide a taste of the Mediterranean. Note: *Phylica pubescens* is also an excellent textured plant for the garden but reluctant to grow in UK climate.

Mentha pulegioides is actually native to the UK and is found in damp places such as meadows, marshes, and ditches. Pennyroyal is a perennial herb that grows to a height of about 30 cm. It has small, round leaves and produces pale lavender-pink flowers in the summer. Pennyroyal is a hardy plant that can tolerate a wide range of conditions, including cold winters. It is also drought-tolerant and can survive in poor soil. A new species for us that we will definitely be planting.

Agave americana formerly *Polianthes tuberosa*, is a tuberous plant originating from Mexico. Flowering in summer with a sweet fragrance. It is best grown in a container in the UK as it can not stand temperatures under 10°C so will need to be brought inside to grow.

Houttuynia cordata is native to Southeast Asia, growing in forests and along wetlands and riverbanks. It is used in culinary dishes and has medicinal purposes in China and Thailand. This low growing perennial can tolerate a wide range of soil conditions and temperatures. It can spread quite quickly so can be classed as invasive however it can make a good ground cover for wet areas.

Romulea columnaris the Californian Tree Poppy is a deciduous, clump forming herbaceous perennial. Full hardy down to -10°C, will do well in dry soil but might take some time to establish, but when it does it becomes vigorous with showy flowers.

Capparis spinosa also known as the caper bush, is a flowering shrub native to the Mediterranean region. It is known for its edible flower buds, called capers, and its fruit, called caperberries, both of which are delicious. And the flowers are very aesthetically pleasing too. Although this plant is not first-hardy it could be grown in a glasshouse with well-drained, sandy or gravelly soil. With the proper care over the colder months this plant would be a great culinary addition to an English garden.



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The Royal Horticultural Society



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