

GARDENS OF FRANCE

In the SPRING



Versailles



The Gardens of Versailles are now one of the most visited public attractions in France. Located to the west of the palace, they span approximately 800 hectares (2,000 acres), with much of the land designed in the classic French formal garden style. In addition to the meticulously manicured lawns, parterres, and sculptures, the gardens feature fountains spread throughout the area. Dating back to the time of Louis XIV, these fountains still operate using much of the same hydraulic system that was in place during the Ancien Régime, adding to the unique character of the Versailles gardens. To preserve the design, the garden was replanted roughly once every 100 years. Louis XVI oversaw the first major replanting at the start of his reign, and a subsequent replanting took place during the rule of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (1808–1873). After being damaged by a series of storms in the late 20th century, including the particularly devastating storm of December 1999, the gardens have been fully replanted and now boast a fresh, youthful appearance that closely resembles how they would have looked in the time of Louis XIV.



Arboretum De La Roche- Guyon



The arboretum of La Roche-Guyon is a 13-hectare public arboretum located in the heart of a 350-hectare forest. Established in 1990, it serves as a unique geographical representation of the Île-de-France region. The arboretum contains 1,821 trees, each representing one of the region's municipalities. These include oak, dogwood, eucalyptus, bramble, holly, buckthorn, and yew trees (Seine-et-Marne); ash, viburnum, and spindle trees (Val-d'Oise); beech and rowan trees (Yvelines); cherry and currant trees (Seine-Saint-Denis); plane trees (Paris); hornbeams (Val-de-Marne); and lime trees and laurels (Hauts-de-Seine).



Claude Monet's Garden



Claude Monet's Water Lily Pond in Giverny - Photo by Ariane Cauderlier

Monet's garden is divided into two parts: the Clos Normand flower garden in front of the house and a Japanese-inspired water garden across the road. The two areas contrast yet complement each other beautifully.

The Clos Normand covers about one hectare. Monet designed a garden filled with perspectives, symmetries, and vibrant colors. The land is divided into flowerbeds where clusters of flowers of varying heights create volume. Fruit trees and ornamental trees dominate, along with climbing roses, tall hollyhocks, and colorful banks of annuals. Monet mixed simple flowers, such as daisies and poppies, with rarer varieties. Monet disliked overly organized or constrained gardens. He arranged flowers by their colors and allowed them to grow freely.

In 1893, ten years after settling in Giverny, Monet purchased an adjacent plot of land across the railway. This is where he created his famous water garden, featuring the iconic Japanese bridge covered in wisteria, smaller bridges, weeping willows, a bamboo grove, and, most notably, the water lilies (nymphéas) that bloom throughout the summer. The pond and its surrounding vegetation create an enclosed space, separate from the surrounding countryside. Photography is allowed in the garden, but only from the designated walkways.



Château De Chambord



The Château de Chambord is one of the most recognizable châteaux in the world, known for its distinctive French Renaissance architecture that blends traditional French medieval forms with classical Renaissance structures.

Chambord is built on land that varies from sandy to clay soils, supporting limited vegetation. Sandstone only appears briefly in the northwestern part of the estate. The abundance of clay holds a large amount of water, and, combined with the flat terrain, creates swamps, ponds, and marshes that support a rich biodiversity.

Today, apart from 200 hectares of agricultural fields, 160 hectares of prairies for wild boars, and 200 hectares that include the village, the domain is covered with oak and Scots pine trees of varying sizes. The area features a mix of regular high forests, layered coppice, heath or broom moors, ponds, and swamps in succession, all of which contribute to the diverse and thriving wildlife. The open, airy forests with clearings provide ideal habitats for animals. The Chambord territory is home to over 650 naturally occurring plant species, including 150 remarkable ones, most of which are specific to the water and wetland areas.



Château de Villandry



The Château de Villandry is a stunning castle that has been inhabited since the Renaissance. It is one of the most magnificent castles ever built along the banks of the Loire River. Since the 1920s, the château has been open to visitors from around the world.

The garden features a romantic English-style landscaped park, offering a perfect contrast to the rest of the property. The gardens span 9 hectares and are uniquely arranged across different terraces, creating layers of beauty throughout the estate. These include the Water Garden, which is filled with small ponds and fountains, the Ornamental Garden, where you can see various flowers and arrangements changing with the seasons, the Sun Garden (Jardin du Soleil), and a large Vegetable Garden, which is the most popular area of the château. This garden was inspired by the medieval tradition of monks tending to vegetable and flower plots around monasteries.

In the gardens, you'll find an incredible variety of flowers and vegetables, with each color symbolizing something different. For example, the pergola in the vegetable garden is said to represent heaven, and this spot has traditionally been used for meditation and self-care.



Royal Château of Amboise

The Palace of the Kings of France during the Renaissance and the burial site of Leonardo da Vinci.

One of the architectural gems of the Château d'Amboise is the Saint Hubert Chapel, which is visible as soon as you approach. Be sure to look up and admire the remarkable stained glass windows of the chapel. It is within this chapel that you can find the tomb of Leonardo da Vinci, the Italian genius who expressed a wish to rest in Amboise for eternity.

The garden of the Royal Castle of Amboise covers just over 2 hectares and consists of two main sections. The first is the Terrace of Naples, designed by a Neapolitan landscape painter at the end of the 15th century. It was the first "Italian-style" garden in the kingdom. The second is the "Contemporary Garden," which follows the contours of the English-style park created by Louis-Philippe in the 19th century. Among the must-see features are the thousands of perfectly pruned boxwood balls and remarkable tree species.

Located 400 meters from the Château Royal d'Amboise and connected by an underground passageway is the Château Clos Lucé, where Leonardo da Vinci lived until his death. Today, it is a museum dedicated to his life and work.



Chateau Clos Luce



While the gardens of the Château d'Amboise are not vast, they have been beautifully designed, blending immaculately clipped box balls and cones with a looser, more contemporary planting style that is currently in vogue but suits the historic château perfectly.

In front of the château, symmetrical lawns and pathways extend, and where the ground slopes upwards at the sides and far end of the garden, a river of box balls topped with clipped spherical trees adds life and drama to the slopes.



Clipped box cones and tall, slender Italian cypress trees introduce height and interest, and at their base, the beds are filled with a relaxed mix of plants, including geraniums and salvias. In some areas, taller plants like white roses have been added, and there is also a section of muscat vines. The color palette is a simple blend of green, grey, and white, with occasional pops of blue and pink to brighten the mix.

As with many gardens in France, the box tree caterpillar is a problem, and pheromone traps can be seen scattered throughout the box plantings. The caterpillar of the box tree moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*) is causing significant damage in France, where box topiary plays a key role in many gardens, and traps and sprays are often in use. However, at Amboise, they have clearly managed the issue well, and the box balls and cones are in excellent condition!



Château de Chenonceau

Château de Chenonceau is renowned for its stunning Renaissance-style gardens, which are home to more than 130,000 flowering plants. The gardens are divided into several distinct areas, the two main ones being those of Catherine de Medici and Diane de Poitiers. There is also a maze and a green garden.

King Henry II gave the château to his mistress, Diane de Poitiers, who created a garden on the right side of the castle. However, after Henry's death, his wife, Catherine de Medici, forced Diane out and established her own garden on the left side.

Diane's garden is a French formal garden, designed around eight triangular lawns. At the center of the garden stands an ornamental fountain. The flower beds are replanted twice a year—once in spring with bulbs, violas, and daisies, and again in summer with petunias, dahlias, tobacco, and verbena. Roses and 3,000 meters of santolina plants form part of the permanent structure of the garden.

Catherine's garden features an avenue of orange trees, climbing roses, and flower borders along the edge of the moat.

The green garden, created for the Countess of Villeneuve, boasts an exceptional collection of ancient trees and was designed in the style of an English garden.

There is also a maze, planted with 2,000 yew trees, and a raised gazebo at its center. From the gazebo, visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of the maze.



Le Jardin Champêtre



It's not often that your first view of a garden comes from above, but Le Jardin Champêtre in southwest France offers just that opportunity. Set in a river valley, the garden lies four meters below the road, allowing visitors to enjoy its informal layout from above before descending to explore more fully along its gravel pathways.

Still a young garden, Le Jardin Champêtre is sure to be an exciting space to watch in the coming years. It is part of a new generation of Mediterranean-zone gardens that focus on developing shrubs, grasses, and perennials, greatly expanding planting possibilities.



Le Jardin Méditerranéen: Roquebrun



This garden is home to an impressive collection of cacti, lemon trees, and a variety of exotic plants from the Mediterranean region.

Le Jardin Méditerranéen, founded in 1986, spans centuries-old south-facing terraces, bordered to the west by dolomitic 'pipe organs.' These geological formations absorb heat during the day and release it at night, creating ideal conditions for plants that thrive in arid and dry climates.

Due to Roquebrun's location in the Orb Valley, the Jardin Méditerranéen benefits from the village's unique microclimate, which is perfect for mimosa, cacti, lemons, and other exotic plants. With over 4,000 plants representing around 400 species, the garden has become one of the most important collections of Mediterranean and exotic vegetation.



Montpellier Botanical Garden

The Oldest French Garden

The Jardin des Plantes de Montpellier, covering 4.5 hectares, is France's oldest botanical garden. Established in 1593 by royal decree from King Henri IV, the garden was originally created to promote health through medicinal plants.

Today, the garden is home to approximately 2,680 plant species, including 500 native to the Mediterranean region. Of these, about 2,000 species are grown outdoors, and 1,000 are housed under glass. Major sections of the garden include the Montagne de Richer, known for its flowering rockroses with large white or yellow flowers that bloom from April. This area is located in the garden's oldest section, which also now features a systematic garden. The orangery was completed in 1804, and the arboretum was landscaped in 1810. The English Garden, with its pool and greenhouse, dates from 1859, while the monumental Martins greenhouse opened in 1860.

In 2022, the Jardin des Plantes was awarded the "Remarkable Garden" certification for five years. This label recognizes gardens and parks—whether public or private—that offer cultural, aesthetic, historical, or botanical significance.



Château de Flaugergues



A GREAT Family Tradition

The folies (holiday homes) in the region were built by members of the local gentry at the end of the 17th century and throughout the 18th century. Today, with great passion, they continue to preserve and celebrate this exceptional historical and winegrowing heritage. Vines have been cultivated in this area since Roman times, and a descendant of Jean-Baptiste Colbert now produces the Flaugergues wine.

The grounds feature French-style gardens, an orangery, a park in the “English style,” a “five senses” garden, and a bamboo plantation. A striking feature of the château is its interior, with the staircase occupying almost one-third of the building. This grand staircase serves all the floors of the château. Along the staircase, you can admire a series of tapestries from Flanders, created in 1670, depicting scenes from the life of Moses. The salons are elegantly furnished with beautiful Louis XV and Louis XVI style furniture, and the library houses a collection of ancient scientific instruments.



The Saint Adrien Garden

“classified as an “unmissable garden”



The Saint Adrien Garden is one of the most spectacular sites in the region.

It was the dream of a local man, created on the site of a medieval quarry dating back to the Middle Ages, and has gradually been transformed into a lush green setting—a paradoxical oasis set on volcanic rocks.

The garden spans four hectares and features four large water features. Water lilies, lotus flowers, bougainvilleas, agaves, pampas grass, and roses are among the plants that add structure, color, and scent to the garden.

The garden's centerpiece is a large natural lake, surrounded by rocky slopes planted with stunning agaves. The surrounding grass remains verdant even in the summer, watered by water collected from elsewhere on the property. The overall impression is one of water, rock, and the rich greenery of the lawn and trees.



Le Jardin Sec

Early May provides one of the richest flowering moments

On a windswept site overlooking lagoons near Montpellier, Olivier and Clara Filippi have created a remarkable and experimental garden of Mediterranean native plants.

Nestled between the cliffs and the Filippis' home, this 4,000-square-meter experimental garden boasts a commanding view of the lagoon, yet it is exposed to the harsh salt winds and the extreme heat and drought of summer. To adapt to these challenging conditions and ensure proper drainage, they created mounded gravel beds and designed paths that also function as rivulets to channel floodwater away.

Winding paths lead from the main garden through sparse groves of cypress trees and the generous forms of stone pines. These trees provide some relief from the salt winds and are also deeply evocative of the Mediterranean, which is captured in every aspect of the garden.



Domaine Du Rayol

Garden of the Mediterranean



The Domaine du Rayol is a 20-hectare protected natural area located along the Côte d'Azur, France's Riviera. It is both a botanical garden and an arboretum, comprising 13 hectares of maquis and 7 hectares of cultivated gardens.

Designed by landscaper Gilles Clément, the garden is divided into different botanical regions from around the world. It offers a journey through Mediterranean landscapes from various continents, including South Africa, Australia, California, Chile, and the Mediterranean Basin. Additionally, it showcases regions with drier or subtropical climates, such as Mexico, the Canary Islands, Asia, and subtropical northern Argentina.

Although the Domaine du Rayol specializes in plants suited for hot, dry Mediterranean-type climates, it is surprising to find a New Zealand-style garden here as well. This area features palms, ferns, and phormiums that thrive in high humidity—conditions made possible by a stream and a surrounding garden that maintains a higher humidity than the rest of the property.

"Discovering this garden is like experiencing the emotions of a botanist explorer roaming the planet!"

"To make a garden, you need a piece of land and eternity," Gilles Clément



Jardin Exotique d'Eze

The Jardin Exotique d'Eze is located in a stunning spot overlooking the Provençal hill village of Eze, one of the most picturesque villages in France, as well as the beautiful Côte d'Azur. The garden was established after World War II on the site of an ancient fortress, perched 429 meters above sea level.

Due to its location atop a steep village, soil and rocks had to be manually carried up to create the garden and its terraces, and the cacti and succulents were carried up as well. The plants range from young specimens to mature, old ones, including a crown of thorns weighing half a tonne.



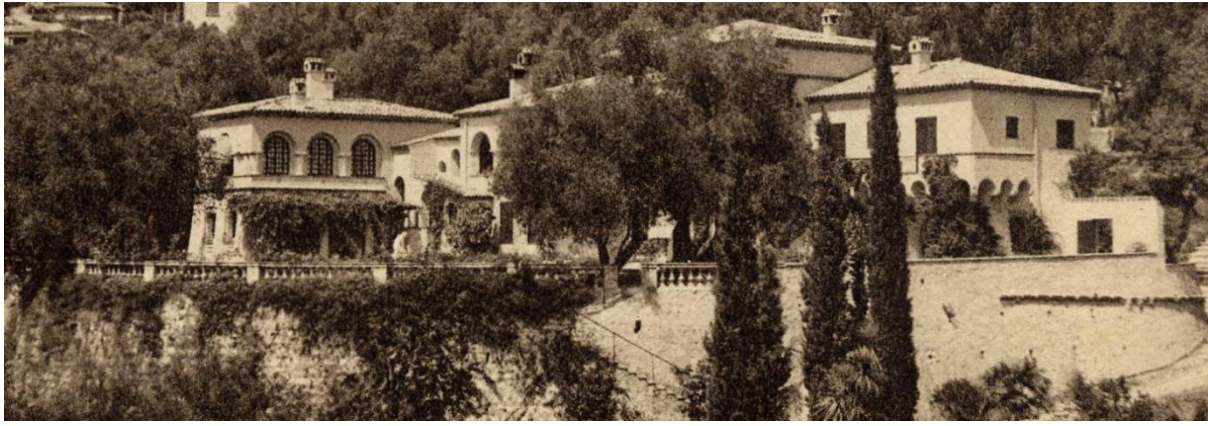
The southern side of the garden is dedicated to cacti, succulents, and xerophytes, while the northern side features more Mediterranean species. Here, you'll find agaves, aloes, euphorbias, agapanthuses, cereus, grusonii, and many more. Many of the plants are enormous compared to their smaller counterparts often seen as houseplants.

Recently, the garden has been extended to include a waterfall and pond, with a few loungers where visitors can stop and enjoy a moment of cool, refreshing respite.

Adding to the charm of the garden are the incredible sea views over the beautiful Côte d'Azur. With its combination of stunning gardens and breathtaking views, a visit to this garden is truly unmissable.



Val Rahmeh Botanical Garden



The Jardin Botanique Exotique de Menton, also known as the Jardin Botanique Exotique du Val Rahmeh, is a botanical garden with roots tracing back to the nineteenth century. The estate was originally established by the De Monléon family, members of Menton's nobility. It was initially composed of agricultural land and a building dating from 1875.

In 1905, Lord Percy Radcliffe, former governor of Malta, and his wife Rahmeh acquired the property and the adjacent farmland to create a garden.

In 1957, Miss May Sherwood Campbell, a botanist by training and passionate about plants, acquired the property. She added a second garden, now accessible via a bridge, and created a pond featuring water hyacinths, water lilies, and papyrus. Miss Campbell, known as the "Lady of the Daturas" for her extensive work with the Solanaceae family, adorned the garden with rare and spectacular species from all over the world. In 1966, she donated the property to the nation.

Today, the garden is home to approximately 1,500 taxa, thriving in a microclimate with high humidity, where temperatures rarely fall below 5°C (41°F) in winter. The garden features rare species such as *Sophora toromiro* (a small tree once native to Easter Island), exceptional olive trees over 400 years old, and a wide variety of exotic plants, including palms, *chorisia*, *datura*, *lotus*, and fine collections of citrus and olives. Other rare species include *Aloe marlothii*, *Araucaria columnaris*, *Castanospermum australe* (Moreton Bay chestnut), *Cnicothamnus lorentzi*, and *Ficus religiosa*. A small rainforest area contains bamboo, gingers, philodendrons, tropical fruit trees, and a path through spices and herbs. The garden also features a remarkable *Musa basjoo* and two *Chorisia speciosa* specimens.



