

Frugal Inspiration from Mughal Gardens



Recently I shared with you that there are [many different garden designs](#) I want to learn more about. One of these designs is from Mughal gardens. These historic Indian gardens are known for their symmetrical design, use of geometric patterns, water features like pools and fountains, and lush greenery. So, I decided to do a little bit more research into these gardens. I learned a little bit about their history and their design. Moreover, I learned how to derive some frugal inspiration for adding features of this style to any garden. Today, I want to share with you what I learned.

History of Mughal Gardens

We can trace the [roots of Mughal gardens](#) back to Central Asia and Persia. There we find the concept of paradise gardens.

Paradise gardens refer to enclosed, lush spaces with meticulously planned layouts. Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, introduced these garden traditions to the Indian subcontinent when he established his rule in the early 16th century.

However, it was during the reign of Babur's grandson, Emperor Akbar, that Mughal gardens flourished and evolved into distinct forms. Akbar, known for his appreciation of art, culture, and architecture, commissioned several gardens, including the famous Garden of the Fateful, which blended Persian and Indian design elements. These gardens were aesthetically pleasing. More than that, though, they served as venues for imperial gatherings, relaxation, and contemplation.

Emperor Jahangir, Akbar's son and successor, further developed the Mughal garden style. He had a profound love for nature and commissioned several gardens that incorporated a diverse array of flora, water features, and pavilions. The Shalimar Bagh in Srinagar and the Nishat Bagh in Kashmir are notable examples of his reign.

The zenith of Mughal garden design is often associated with Emperor Shah Jahan, who is renowned for constructing the Taj Mahal. The gardens surrounding the Taj Mahal itself reflect the pinnacle of Mughal garden architecture, featuring a symmetrical layout, reflecting pools, fountains, and meticulously planned green spaces.

Design Features of Mughal Gardens

[Mughal gardens](#) stand as a testament to the ingenuity and artistic vision of an empire that sought to create earthly paradises. Their symmetrical layouts, water features, lush greenery, and architectural elements continue to awe and inspire, serving as a timeless testament to a glorious era of architectural and horticultural splendor. Here's a closer look at these design features:

Symmetry and Geometric Precision

At the heart of Mughal garden design lies a profound emphasis on symmetry and geometric precision. These gardens are meticulously laid out in perfect symmetrical patterns. They are often divided into quadrants or sections using pathways, water channels, or rows of trees. The precise alignment of pathways, water features, and planting beds reflects a deliberate pursuit of balance and harmony.

Charbagh Layout

The hallmark layout of Mughal gardens is the Charbagh, which translates to “four gardens.” This is a quadrilateral design which is divided into four parts. These four parts symbolize the four rivers of paradise in Islamic tradition. Each section is further subdivided into smaller squares or rectangles, creating a series of interconnected gardens within the larger scheme.

Water Features and Aqueducts

Water plays a central role in Mughal gardens. It symbolizes life, purity, and paradise. These gardens incorporate elaborate water features such as cascading fountains, reflecting pools, channels, and canals. These features not only add to the aesthetic appeal but also serve practical purposes of irrigation and cooling the surroundings. The presence of flowing water and reflective pools amplifies the serene ambiance of these spaces.

Pavilions and Architectural Elements

Strategically placed pavilions, known as ‘baradaris’ or ‘chhatris,’ dot the landscape of Mughal gardens. These pavilions serve as vantage points for enjoying the garden’s beauty and as retreats from the sun, providing shade and a place for leisure and contemplation. The architecture of these

pavilions often exhibit intricate details, including ornate carvings and elaborate domes, showcasing the empire's skilled craftsmanship.

Tilework: Mosaic Patterns

Mughal tilework often involves the creation of mosaic patterns using tiles made from glazed ceramic. These typically feature vibrant hues of blue, green, yellow, and turquoise. These mosaics were meticulously arranged to form intricate designs that captivated the eye and added a sense of grandeur to the garden architecture.

Flora and Landscaping

The lush greenery within Mughal gardens encompasses a meticulously curated selection of plants, including fragrant flowers, fruit-bearing trees, cypress, jasmine, and roses, among others. Designers plant the flora meticulously to create a harmonious blend of colors, textures, and scents, enhancing the sensory experience of visitors.

Integration with Surrounding Landscape

Mughal gardens do not exist as isolated entities; rather, they integrate seamlessly with the natural landscape. The gardens often make use of natural slopes and terrain, creating terraced levels that add depth and visual interest. The garden design often incorporates the surrounding vistas, whether mountains, rivers, or forests.

Terraces

Terracing is a significant feature in Mughal gardens, particularly in landscapes with varying elevations. These gardens often existed on sloping terrain. As a result, designers constructed terraces to create flat, leveled platforms for planting beds, pathways, and water channels.

Tips for Adding Elements of Mughal Design Frugally to Any Garden

- **Symmetry Matters:** Opt for simple, straight-edged pathways. You might even use strings and stakes to plan symmetrical planting layouts without expensive tools or materials.
- **Water Features on a Budget:** Repurpose containers or use affordable pre-formed liners to create small-scale water features like birdbaths or miniature fountains.
- **Tile Accents:** Utilize broken tiles or inexpensive mosaic kits to adorn small areas like garden pots or stepping stones with colorful mosaic patterns.
- **Pavilion or Seating Area:** Repurpose old furniture or use inexpensive materials like pallets to build a simple pergola or seating structure.
- **Use of Plants:** Choose budget-friendly, fast-growing plants like seeds or young saplings for jasmine, roses, or fruit trees. Look for plant sales or nurseries offering discounts.
- **Geometric Planting Beds:** Use cost-effective materials like wooden planks or recycled materials to create raised beds or planters in geometric shapes.
- **Reflective Surfaces:** Repurpose old mirrors or purchase affordable mirrored tiles to create reflective surfaces strategically placed in the garden.
- **Low-Cost Lighting:** Shop for budget-friendly string lights or solar-powered lanterns, or repurpose existing outdoor lighting to create an ambient atmosphere without overspending.
- **Inexpensive Architectural Touches:** Use PVC pipes, wooden frames, or affordable materials to construct arches, trellises, or decorative elements for an architectural touch.
- **Creative Pruning:** Invest time in learning basic pruning techniques and use simple, inexpensive tools like hand

pruners to shape plants into geometric or artistic forms.

What do you think; could you incorporate elements of Mughal gardens into your garden on a budget?

Read More:

- [GREEK GARDEN DESIGN](#)
 - [ENGLISH GARDEN DESIGN](#)
 - [ZEN GARDENS](#)
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Garden Designs I Want to Learn More About



I enjoy exploring different approaches to garden design. There are so many styles that evoke so many different feelings when you're amidst them. Although I know a little bit about a few

styles, there are many others I hope to learn more about in the weeks, months, and years to come.

3 Garden Designs I've Shared With You

I've already shared some details about a few different types of garden designs here on this site. Take a look:

[Greek Garden Design](#)

Discover the essence of Greek garden design: stone features, Mediterranean trees and herbs, terracotta accents, and vibrant colors. Embrace rustic finds, symmetrical layouts, and recycled materials to capture the essence of Greek gardens while staying within your budget.

[English Garden Design](#)

An English garden embodies a blend of formal structure with natural, romantic elements. It includes symmetry, defined lines, and architectural features alongside a more relaxed, naturalistic layout. It embraces abundant plantings and softer transitions, often drawing inspiration from the charm of cottage gardens.

[Zen Gardens](#)

Zen gardens are characterized by their serene and minimalist design, fostering a tranquil environment through carefully arranged elements. You can use many natural elements to create them on a budget.

Garden Designs I Want to Learn More

About

I like learning about historic garden design as well as contemporary design from around the world. Here are some of the different garden types that I would like to learn more about:

Mughal Gardens

The [Mughal Gardens](#) are historic gardens found in South Asia. They are designed to provide a little bit of paradise on Earth. Features include:

- **Symmetrical Layout:** They are typically divided into four quadrants or charbagh. These quadrants are typically organized around a central water feature or pool.
- **Water Features:** In addition to the central pool, Mughal gardens include elaborate water channels, fountains, and reflecting pools.
- **Terraced Levels:** Gardens are sometimes terraced to follow the natural contours of the land, creating a sense of depth and grandeur.
- **Ornate Pavilions and Pavement:** Mughal gardens often feature pavilions or pavilions adorned with intricate carvings, marble inlays, and decorative elements.
- **Lush Vegetation:** Gardens are lush with a variety of flora, including fragrant flowers, fruit-bearing trees, and symmetrical rows of cypress or other trees. These plants provide shade, fragrance, and aesthetic appeal.
- **Intricate Tilework:** Decorative tilework is a prominent feature in Mughal gardens, adorning walls, pathways, and fountains with colorful mosaic designs and intricate patterns.

Italian Renaissance Gardens

Europe has brought us many different types of gardens

throughout time. Italian Renaissance gardens emphasize grandeur, elegance, and human-made beauty. They incorporate extensive use of classical statuary, fountains, terraces, and formal plantings, displaying meticulous symmetry and refined aesthetics. The incorporation of art into nature in these gardens is one thing that really appeals to me.

Additional features include:

- **Geometry:** These gardens are known for their geometric precision. They often follow precise axes, with pathways, hedges, and flowerbeds arranged in symmetrical patterns, creating a sense of order and balance.
- **Formal Design Elements:** Italian Renaissance gardens incorporate formal design elements such as perfectly manicured hedges, geometrically shaped flowerbeds (parterres), and precisely aligned paths or walkways.
- **Water Features:** Water is used to create soothing sounds, provide visual interest, and symbolize purity and life.
- **Ornate Architectural Elements:** Gardens often include ornate pavilions, sculptures, statues, and architectural structures like pergolas or gazebos.
- **Sculpted Plantings:** Plants are often pruned and shaped meticulously to maintain a controlled and uniform appearance. This includes topiaries, shaped shrubs, and [espaliered trees](#) against walls, showcasing a refined and sculptural aspect.

French Formal Gardens

French formal gardens and Italian [Renaissance gardens](#) share similarities. For example, they both emphasize geometric layouts and formal design. They both embrace a sense of grandeur and meticulous planning. Moreover, they both incorporate ornate architectural elements within their designs.

However, they differ in their nuances: French formal gardens

lean toward highly structured and manicured geometric precision, employing elaborate parterres, meticulously sculpted hedges, and axial pathways to create grand vistas. In contrast, Italian Renaissance gardens also embrace symmetry and geometric precision but often incorporate terraces, water features like fountains and reflecting pools, and a deeper integration of art, architecture, and natural landscapes, aiming to evoke a sense of classical harmony and humanistic ideals.

While both styles exude elegance and sophistication through formal design principles, Italian Renaissance gardens often encompass a broader integration of natural and architectural elements, while French formal gardens exhibit meticulous and controlled geometrical aesthetics with precise axial arrangements. I'd like to gain even more insight into the differences between these two garden types.

California Modern & Minimalist Gardens

California modern and minimalist gardens fuse contemporary design principles with the state's outdoor lifestyle. These gardens prioritize clean lines, simplicity, and functionality while embracing the natural beauty of the Californian landscape. Key elements include:

- **Clean Design Aesthetics:** Characterized by minimalism, these gardens focus on simplicity in layout and plant selection. They incorporate geometric shapes, straight lines, and open spaces to create a sense of order and tranquility.
- **Hardscaping Elements:** Materials like concrete, metal, wood, and glass dominate the design, forming pathways, decks, seating areas, and retaining walls. These elements often showcase craftsmanship and emphasize functionality while maintaining an elegant appearance.
- **Native and Drought-Tolerant Plants:** To align with California's climate and conserve water, plant choices

typically include native species or drought-resistant plants such as succulents, agaves, grasses, and other low-maintenance flora. These plants provide texture and color while requiring minimal water.

- **Emphasis on Outdoor Living:** California modern gardens often blur the line between indoor and outdoor spaces, creating seamless transitions. They feature outdoor kitchens, lounge areas, fire pits, and built-in seating, encouraging outdoor living and entertainment.
- **Sustainable Features:** Sustainable practices are integral. Gardens may incorporate environmentally friendly elements such as permeable paving, rainwater harvesting systems, and efficient irrigation techniques to conserve water and reduce environmental impact.
- **Integration of Art and Sculpture:** Sculptural elements, art installations, and strategically placed focal points enhance the garden's visual appeal, adding artistic flair and creating points of interest within the minimalist landscape.
- **Maintenance and Functionality:** These gardens prioritize functionality and ease of maintenance. Plantings are often strategically placed to reduce upkeep, and the overall design aims for simplicity and practicality in its upkeep.

What's your favorite garden design? Share in the comments!

Greek Gardening Style on the Cheap



Recently I was reading an article about 2023 gardening style trends. It referenced a current resurgence of passion for the Greek Garden. That sent me down a rabbit hole of beautiful fascinating looks at Greek-inspired gardens. However, so many of them are so pricy. So, I am curious about what we can do to enjoy this trend at a cheaper cost.

What Is Greek Gardening?

The initial article that I read about [gardening trends](#) describes Greek gardens using some of the following images:

- The use of stone all throughout the garden, but particularly stone walls
- Accented, of course, with marble, particularly marble columns
- Mediterranean fruit trees, of course – Cyprus and pomegranate
- As well as herbs and flowers that are great at handling drought, for wetter winters and drier summers –

- lavender, cysts, thyme
- And olives, of course, grow olives
- Create seating areas that are surrounded by arches that have climbing plants and tall trees around them
- Create different levels for the effect of Greece's hills – raised beds, elevated patios, etc.

All of this makes a lot of sense to me. I haven't been to Greece, but I've been to Mediterranean locations nearby, and this all resonates with what I've seen. Moreover, it makes sense for California gardens to adopt some Greek gardening ideas, since our climates have a lot of similarities.

Other Greek Gardening Details

Exploring a variety of other blogs and articles about Greek Gardens, here are some additional features I find listed:

- More fruit trees – lemons, limes, tangerines
- More herbs – rosemary, sage, oregano
- Succulents, add succulents
- Add just a splash of colorful red or pink with flowers like pelargoniums or bougainvillea
- Decorating with white and blue, those classic color that conjure up a Greek island
- Incorporate Greek tiles in the walkway, again think white and blue
- Add some terracotta pots
- Use stones to create intriguing lines and curves that give a geometric design to the landscape
- Put a table in the garden for outdoor dining

10 Tips for a Frugal Approach to a Greek Garden

In thinking about creating this type of garden, here's what comes to mind about doing so frugally:

1. Start With Small Changes

The biggest mistake that you can make in terms of frugal gardening is to change everything all at once. Believe me, I get it – the urge to create the garden of your dreams in one fell swoop. However, you already have your garden, and even if it's nothing like the Greek Garden that you want to create, it's valuable exactly as it is. Therefore, don't ruin what you've already got. Start small. Incorporate a little bit of stone here and there. Add some olive trees. Paint an exterior wall white with blue trim.

2. Get Creative with Stone

Stone is such a big features of Greek Gardens. And yet, stonework can be very pricy. While we would all love to enjoy fancy marble and exquisite stone arches, that's not a frugal approach to enhancing our garden. So, instead, consider ways to more frugally incorporate the essence of this. Add a gravel walkway, for example. Look for some of the [cheapest rocks](#) – pea gravel, crushed granite, and river rocks are all good choices. They may not be exactly the Greek Gods of garden stone, but they help add that flavor and create beauty in your space.

3. Wait For Discounts For The Better Stuff

If you really want a stunning pergola or a marble arch, find ways to reduce the cost of adding such a feature to your garden. Check Craigslist and Freecycle and Facebook Marketplace and all of those types of spots for reduced cost items like this that people are eager to give away. Put the word out among your network that this is what you're seeking and see if it finds its way to you.

4. Barter For What You Want, Especially Trees

Ready to add some of those great citrus trees to your garden? Instead of investing in them at full price, see if you can locate someone who already has some in their garden that they want to trade. What do you have in your garden that you can trade for the plants that you want? You can slowly add the Greek-inspired trees and herbs while slowly reducing the other plants in your garden just by making savvy trades.

5. Think Rustic

There are many different approaches to Greek gardens. Of course, you're going to see a lot of Instagram-worthy perfection. However, rustic is absolutely another way to go that is authentically Greek. If you want to add an al fresco dining table to your Greek Garden, for example, think rustic in design. And think cheap. Yard sales and flea markets and online "free" messages are a great place to find the table as well as the seating and settings for it.

6. Don't Shy Away From Terracotta Pots

Of course, very authentic high quality terracotta is going to cost you some money. But all of us can pretty easily get our hands on the cheaper alternatives. And they're going to give you that same effect of a Greek Garden look. So, embrace them. When it's time to do some repotting in your garden, think terracotta.

7. Incorporate Symmetry Into Your Redesign

[Gardenista](#) recommends using symmetry in your garden to help get the Greek effect. As you begin to make changes, adding and removing features, remember this. Mirror-image beds are one

example. Look around your garden for key features spots and then ask yourself how you might create symmetry there.

8. Add a Statue or Two

While not all Greek Gardens incorporate these, many do. Moreover, you can easily give nod to the culture with statues and urns. Obviously, look for these at places like flea markets where you can get them at a bargain.

9. Emphasize Low Cost Herbs That Don't Require Extensive Watering

This is such a key features of Greek Gardens. Moreover, it's a really great way to grow the size and design of your garden without spending a lot of money. Oregano, thyme, rosemary, sage, lavender ... these are all great options to build out your garden. Plus, you can use them in your kitchen, saving you money that way as well.

10. Use Recycled or Upcycled Materials for Creating Garden Levels

If you want to incorporate the idea of raised beds and slight terraces, then you can look for recycled materials to help you do so. Get your hands on some bricks or palettes that someone is giving away for free or cheap and put in the labor to make them look beautiful.

Read More:

- [Are Old Tires Toxic To Plants?](#)
- [5 Free Garden Marker Ideas to Keep Track of Plants](#)
- [Don't Throw Those Pots Away](#)