

A Visit to Hollister House Garden



Hollister House Garden, all photos by Kathryn Vercillo,

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I'm never going to have an English garden. It just feels a little bit too perfect for my brown thumb, even though it has some informality to it. Either way, though, they are beautiful gardens, and it's a delight to get a chance to visit one. I had just that chance recently on a family trip to Connecticut. We were staying in Washington, CT, where we visited the Hollister House Garden.

What Is Hollister House Garden?

As [the website](#) proudly proclaims, this garden is:

"A classic garden in the English manner, with a loosely formal structure, informally planted in generous abundance situated in the Litchfield hills of Northwestern Connecticut."

They further go on to explain that the garden is inspired by famous English gardens. However, it's an American version of that inspiration, particularly in terms of plant choice.



What Is an English Garden?

An English garden refers to a particular style of gardening that originated in England. It became popular during the 18th and 19th centuries. Their style is characterized by its

naturalistic, romantic, and somewhat informal design despite the fact that it has a formal structure.

Formal aspects of the English garden include:

1. **Symmetry and Balance:** Formal English gardens often exhibit a sense of symmetry and balance in their design. Pathways, hedges, and flowerbeds may be laid out in precise geometric patterns, creating an orderly and structured appearance.
2. **Defined Shapes and Lines:** The formal elements of an English garden involve crisp and well-defined shapes and lines. This includes neatly trimmed hedges, geometrically shaped flowerbeds, and precisely aligned paths or walkways.
3. **Architectural Features:** Formal English gardens often incorporate architectural elements, such as statuary, fountains, and ornate gazebos. These features add a touch of elegance and structure to the overall design, enhancing the formal atmosphere.
4. **Pruned and Controlled Plantings:** Plants in formal English gardens are typically pruned and shaped meticulously to maintain a controlled and uniform appearance. This includes topiaries, espaliered trees against walls, and manicured shrubs.



Informal aspects of the English garden include:

1. **Naturalistic Layout:** Informal English gardens embrace a more natural and relaxed layout. Paths and walkways may meander and curve, mimicking the flow of nature rather than adhering to strict geometric patterns.

2. **Abundance of Plantings:** Informal gardens are known for their profusion of plants and flowers. They often feature mixed and densely planted beds of various colors, textures, and heights, creating a sense of abundance and wild beauty.
3. **Soft Edges and Blending:** Informal English gardens avoid sharp edges and instead emphasize softer transitions. Plants may spill over onto pathways, creating a more organic and less structured appearance.
4. **Embracing Nature:** Informal gardens celebrate the natural characteristics of the landscape. They may incorporate elements such as natural rock formations, existing trees, and gentle slopes, harmonizing with the surroundings rather than imposing rigid structure.
5. **Cottage Garden Influence:** Informal English gardens often draw inspiration from traditional cottage gardens, with their casual and charming aesthetics. This influence can be seen in the use of cottage-style plants, including roses, hollyhocks, and other cottage garden favorites.



More About Hollister House Garden

George Schoellkopf started the garden in 1979. The garden is located on about 25 acres of woodsy land, next to a house built in the 18th century. Hollister House Garden was designed

to complement the old house as well as the barns and buildings from the same era that surround the place. They used antique / handmade materials as much as possible to add to this feeling.

The garden combines formal elements with the natural surroundings. The paths, walls, and hedges blend into the landscape. There are about different sections with varying colors and spaces. Walls and hedges, about eight to ten feet tall, define the different areas, creating a solid structure for the various plantings. There is also a winding brook and a large pond on the property.

Plants at Hollister House Garden

Naturally, you'll see [different plants blooming at different times](#) depending on when you visit the garden. These are mostly spring and summer plants. Therefore, you should visit between April and October. During the winter months, you get a little bit of fall foliage, but you don't see a lot of the beauty of the English garden. We went at the beginning of June, which is one of the best times of year to go. I recognized lilies and forget-me-nots, as well as the red Japanese Maple trees.

My sister knows plants a lot better than I do, so she pointed out the others for me. The small hedges were Boxwood, the large ones were Yew. There were also a lot of dogwood trees. For flowers she noticed irises, peonies, azalea, zinnias. She said not everything was in bloom but we also saw viburnum, daisies, salvia, dianthus, sweet bush, and wiegela. And, of course, mountain laurel, which is the state flower. It was a lot of lovely color laid out in little "rooms" separated by hedges.



What I Loved About Hollister House Garden

Those “rooms” are what’s so great about English gardens. One of the things that I love about old San Francisco houses is that they’re made up all of these little rooms and nooks so

even in a small square footage space, you get to explore and see discover things. English gardens are like this. While this particular garden is large, you could scale it down and use hedges to create rooms in a smaller garden and achieve the same effect. It's a delight because it feels like you're on an adventure, not just sitting in a garden.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with just sitting in a garden, either. There are plenty of great places to just sit in this garden as well. Benches. Tiered rock stairs. We hiked over a small bridge to a viewpoint overlooking the house and garden, sitting on large rocks there. It was peaceful. Beautiful. Inspiring. Colorful. Green, so green. The weather was lovely, the view was amazing, and the people we ran into while visiting were all welcoming. All in all, it's what you want when you visit a garden.

Read More:

- [Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness](#)
- [The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits](#)
- [Greek Gardening Style on the Cheap](#)

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](#)