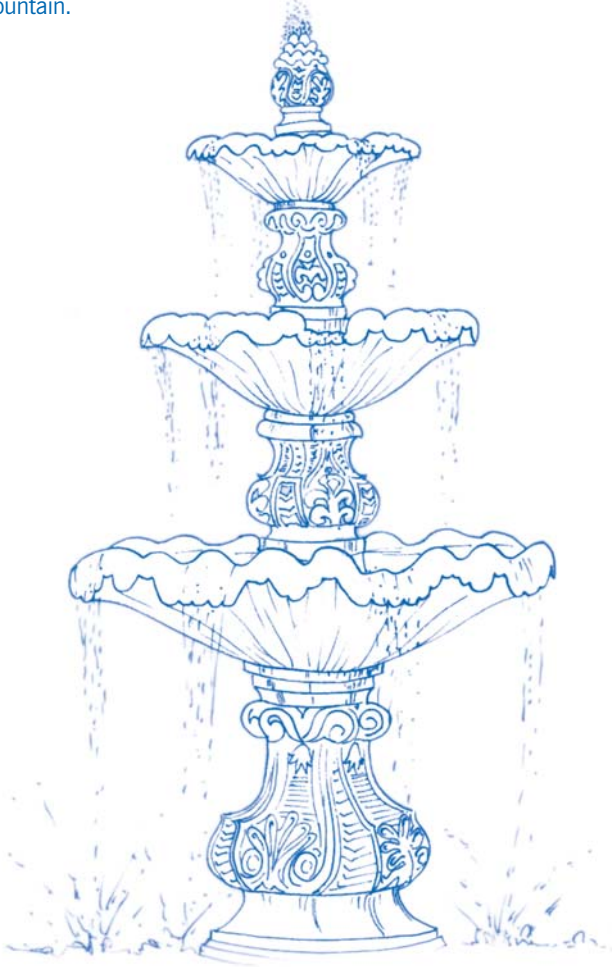




creating an...Italian Garden

Creating an Italian garden

The "Formal Garden" tradition has its roots firmly in Renaissance Italy, where man first stamped his mark of order and geometry over both plant and landscape. Vast terraces arose, separated by gravel, balustrading and statuary, surrounding a central ornate fountain.



The style of Italian gardens has evolved over time to encompass herb filled parterres of box, to groves of Olive and Citrus, punctuated by pencil thin Italian Cypress. But the unchanging theme throughout these designs is the range of plants gardeners have used.

Follow our essential guide to create your very own "Italian Garden", or simply transform a sunny patio into a year round reminder of a sun drenched Mediterranean holiday destination.

Olive and Citrus

What could be more evocative of Italy than a row of Olive or Citrus trees, in ornate terracotta pots. Both varieties however, require protection from frost during the winter. (Move containerised plants into the shelter of a heated greenhouse, conservatory or cool, bright room indoors. Reduce watering, but feed with "Winter Citrus Feed" to maintain health and vigour.) Alternatively, a hardier option would be clipped Laurel, *Photinia*, *Viburnum tinus* or Box - capable of living outside all year round. Feed each spring with Miracle-Gro Controlled Release Plant Food, to maintain healthy, robust plant growth.

Terracing

If you don't have room for an entire terrace, edge your patio with stone balustrade - to provide an elegant boundary to a dining or seating area. Available in sections, it can be assembled to span any distance.

Formal design

Italian gardens are inspired by formal, geometric shapes. If designing an area from scratch, plot it first on paper, quarter it and treat each area in a similar manner. Choose a focal point for the centre of each bed, such as an Italian Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), topiary, clipped standard or provide hard landscaping in the form of a statue or obelisk.

Aromatic plants

Don't neglect scent in the garden. Italian gardens are full of perfumed and aromatic plants - plan for these during the summer. Scent intensifies with heat as the volatile oils held within the foliage become more active - so site aromatic plant in the sunniest positions available. Fill terracotta or stone pots with *Lilium regale* and top off with Tulips for the spring. Dot pots of herbs around the patio - ideal for last minute additions to meals. Use scented Lavender and Rosemary to edge paths and borders.

Statues

Many, well known Victorian interpretations of Italian Gardens were inspired by buying trips to Europe or a "Grand Tour" - when statues, ornaments and antiquities were brought back to England. Show off similar "prized finds" from the garden centre, in a prominent way - on plinths, either lining a path or as a centrepiece to a "cameo" in the flower border. Create a dramatic view by placing a stone urn or romantic statue at the furthest point of the garden. Direct the "eye" to it with a converging avenue of Cypress or clipped evergreens, decreasing in size the further away they are, to add to the impression of perspective..



Water feature

The sound of running water, of which the Italians were particularly fond, is an essential element in any garden. There is no need for a large pond (unless your garden will happily accommodate one), a self-contained fountain unit sitting in a pebble pool, will provide ample scope for contemplation.