



Mediterranean Gardening France

www.mediterraneangardeningfrance.org

JANUARY 2024



Season's greetings and happy new year

Dear members and friends

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES IN FRANCE

Tuesday 28 – Thursday 30 May

MGF Annual Meeting 2024 and garden visit programme – organised by Jacqueline Potter

Preliminary information



Photo: Castel St Clair

The 2024 Annual Meeting will take place in Hyères, the oldest resort town on the French Riviera. We will start with a guided tour of the town to learn about La Belle Époque and the people who came here in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and created some of the gardens we will be visiting.

Over the next two days we'll visit the gardens of Edith Wharton, Charles de Noailles and Paul Bourget, together with some more recently created private gardens.

The AGM, at which we'll celebrate the first 10 years of Mediterranean Gardening France, will be held in the early evening on Wednesday 29 May, followed by a dinner. As an optional additional day, either Monday 27 or Friday 31 May, we are researching walks on the nearby island of Porquerolles.

We hope to reserve some rooms in the Hyères hotel where we will hold the Assemblée Générale, so to help with planning, we would like to know how many of you might be interested in attending. If you think you would like to come, please email [Christine Daniels](mailto:Christine.Daniels@mediterraneangardeningfrance.org) before 14 January, indicating how many people and whether you be interested in walking on Porquerolles on either the Monday or Friday.

Monday 29 January at 10.30, Château Pérouse, route de Nîmes, 30800 St-Gilles (Gard)

A talk by Pierre Bianchi on how to use Australian plants in our gardens



Photo: Château-Pérouse

If you'd like to beat the winter blues by enjoying images of Australian gardens and dreaming of winter blooms, then this is the day for you. At 10.30, Pierre Bianchi will address this topic: "Acclimatization: Bringing Australian plants from their regions of origin to our gardens". Then we will have a picnic lunch (please bring your own) in the chateau. In the afternoon, the dreams will come to life as we walk in the botanical garden and admire the acacias in flower.

On arrival, turn right and follow signs for Parking. Tel: 04 66 87 29 11.

If you would like to attend, please email [Chantal Guiraud](mailto:Chantal.Guiraud@mpg.org).

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INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Friday 16 to Friday 23 February, Paphos, Cyprus

Wild flora and historic sights of Cyprus



A trip organised by MPG based in Paphos and in Latchi on the edge of the Akamas nature reserve. Spring comes early in the eastern Mediterranean and we can expect a range of spring flowers including many endemic species of orchids. The tour will be led by Yiannis Christofides, author of two books on the plants of Cyprus.

For more information and to book, see [the Forthcoming Events page](#) of the MPG website.

Photo: *Mandragora officinarum*

Monday 22 – Monday 29 April, Corfu, Greece

Fabulous gardens of Corfu



This spring tour organised by MPG will feature visits to exceptional private gardens in the northern part of Corfu including Gastouri and the Rothschild estate, which has beautiful courtyards paved by the painter and sculptor Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas. Walks will provide opportunities to photograph spring wildflowers. There will be time to explore the historic Corfu Town with its Venetian architecture and to visit the old British cemetery with its wild orchids and specimen trees.

Photo: Gastouri

For more information and to book, see [the Forthcoming Events page](#) of the MPG website.

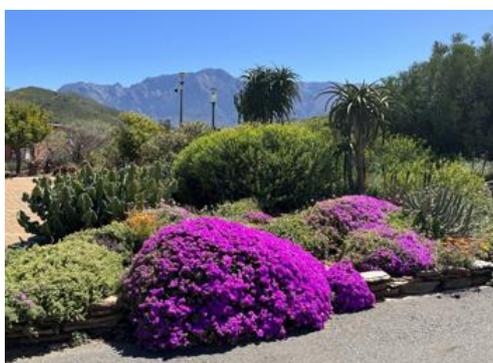
OTHER DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Plant fairs and open gardens 2024

27/28 January	Mimosalia	Bormes-les-Mimosas (Var)
3 /4 February	Fête du Mimosa	Sainte-Maxime (Var)
4 February	Salon des Orchidées	Vergèze (Gard)
17 Feb – 3 March	Fête du Citron	Menton (Alpes-Maritimes)
17 Feb – 3 March	Festival des orchidées	Menton (Alpes-Maritimes)
3 March	La Fête de la Nature en Minervois	La Redorte (Aude)

NEWS AND INFORMATION

New on the website



[Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden, South Africa](#)

“120 km north-east of Cape Town, in a spectacular setting near the city of Worcester, lies the Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden. It comprises 154 hectares of semi-desert vegetation, 11 of which are cultivated, the rest being natural mountain side with rocky outcrops, covered in bushes and succulents.”

Read about some of the fascinating flora in this garden in Christine Daniels’ description of her visit.



[La Journée de la Figue](#)

Ellie has written an account of our September day learning about fig trees and figs at the Maison de la Figue in the medieval village of Vézénobres, Gard. The orchard has over 80 varieties of fig, some of which are held in a conservation section, as they have become extinct in their native lands.

Photo © La Maison de la Figue



[Agave bracteosa, a thornless agave](#)

Annie Nivière recommends this thornless evergreen agave with an interesting tulip-shaped heart, and narrow, flexible, light green curved leaves. It tolerates drought, heat and cold, so is perfect for Mediterranean gardens in southern France. Read more in the Plant Articles section of our website.



Pistacia atlantica

Another interesting plant article, this time about a small tree for Mediterranean gardens, perfectly equipped for climate change, recommended by Pierre Bianchi.

Pierre writes: I decided to grow this tree on the advice of a rare, true Occitan nurseryman, he was even a Catalan! The instructions were simple: "Plant it in autumn and let it fend for itself".

New MGF leaflet

You may remember that at this summer's AGM, Roseanne McNamee suggested that our out-of-date leaflet be re-created, so that it could be distributed at plant fairs and at nurseries where Mediterranean plants are sold. A working group was formed to coordinate the design and the leaflet should be ready for distribution early in the new year.

We are now looking for volunteers to take the leaflets to good quality nurseries or to give to purveyors of Mediterranean plants at plant fairs. In particular, we would be grateful to hear from any of our members living in the Alpes-Maritimes, as MGF is under-represented in this area. If you are willing to participate in this very important initiative, please contact Roseanne at rmcnamee@btinternet.com.

Pine needles, pine needles and pine needles



Roland Leclercq a écrit:

In the November newsletter, I wondered how to use the pine needles that line my garden. The artificial intelligence, Chat GPT, suggested some solutions (see the November newsletter). I was also hoping that some members would be willing to share their experience with me.

This is what the members wrote to me.

Pierre: For me, humus is the life, the richness and the future of a soil, so it seems unthinkable to me, in a region where deciduous trees and their leaves are rare, to get rid of the pine needles, holm oak or eucalyptus leaves that are the usual 'waste' from our trees in the southern Mediterranean. Of course, at first you hesitate, because you read everywhere, in a cascade of blind compilations or in the writings of city dwellers or gardeners with richer sources of humus, that these needles and leaves are detestable. Why is this? Is their use really harmful?

As a scientist, I first noticed that coniferous forests often have a good layer of humus; although few herbaceous plants grow in the pine litter, mushrooms (such as boletes and blood or delicious milk caps), which need humus, grow there in autumn. Similarly, in the giant eucalyptus forests, where rainfall is abundant, the soil is humic under the eucalyptus litter and there are undergrowth plants.

Then, to get a clearer idea of the conditions in the garden, I tested spreading these "waste products" in large doses (4 wheelbarrows of eucalyptus leaves covered with 4 other wheelbarrows of pine needles) on an 'Oro Blanco' pomelo every year in late summer and early autumn, when the needles and leaves are a nuisance. I add two supplements. As my soil is spontaneously acidic, I sprinkle half a 10-litre bucket of wood ash over the leaves as soon as my chimney is working (2nd half of November), then as a citrus fruit is greedy and this activates the decomposition of organic matter, As soon as the pomelo buds swell (2nd half of February), I spread 5 to 6 handfuls of complete fertiliser over the foliage and repeat in mid-April when the fruit sets and starts to swell.



Photo: Pomelo 'Oro blanco'

Result: - on the soil, after 5 to 10 years (yes, it's a bit long) you get an undergrowth soil, the soil has become black and rich in humus, despite the shade, weeds manage to grow there in spring when the mulch is a bit old, you can plant a spade there, whereas it's almost impossible on the rest of the land. The soil retains moisture longer than the rest of the land. The layer of leaves and needles limits evaporation and therefore the frequency of watering,

The dark colour of the soil allows it to cool fairly quickly in spring.

The leaves are large, thick and very dark green, and the fruit is plentiful, large and good (photos).

Since then, I've used this system on all my plants, especially the 'Australians'.

I even collect pine needles from the neighbouring green space.

My advice is to place the various, sometimes unattractive, debris, which would be blown away by the wind, against the ground, then cover it with pine needles, which make a neat, wind-resistant finish.

In this age of recycling, let's not get rid of an asset to the garden.

Monique: I have a few planters in which I've planted Marigette strawberry plants. The other varieties don't survive from one year to the next (pine needles or not), and I have no explanation for this.

I cover the soil with 3 to 4 cm of pine needles every spring. The aim is to acidify the soil and isolate the strawberries from the soil.

ChatGPT forgot another use: creating a toboggan run. I saw this on a TV programme in the Landes. On a slope, it might amuse the children!

Roseanne : I use mine on paths. I like the look of them, they are softer under foot than gravel - and of course they are free.

FROM OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Mediterranean Gardening Chile

Alfredo Unda writes:



Bollén - *Kogeneckia oblonga*

“Hello to all Mediterranean gardener friends!

I am sending news of three newly described native species very good for gardening that are now in bloom in the spring at Aurora. We have had our first year with normal rainfall after a 14-year drought! The vegetation has returned in a remarkable way.

The species described are 'Huilmo', a small herb, a shrub named 'Old Man's Beard', and a tree called 'Bollén'. All can be seen on our website, medgardenchile, in Spanish and English.

Inquiries and comments welcome.”

WHAT IS IT?

In this topic, photographs of unusual plants, fruits, seeds or garden tools will be shown without the caption and readers are asked to identify them. The answer will be given in the following newsletter. Contributions should be sent to [Roland Leclercq](mailto:Roland.Leclercq).



The November “What is it?” (Pierre Bianchi) showed buttons of *Hakea petiolaris* (sea-urchin hakea). This shrub or small tree is endemic to the south west of Australia

AND FINALLY

“It’s better to plant a 50-cent plant in a \$5 hole, than a \$5 plant in a 50-cent hole.”
(Ralph Snodsmith, 1939-2010, American writer, gardening expert, radio columnist).

Best wishes

Roland Leclercq

Newsletter editor

Please send contributions to this newsletter to: rolandlec@wanadoo.fr