



Mediterranean Gardening France

www.mediterraneangardeningfrance.org

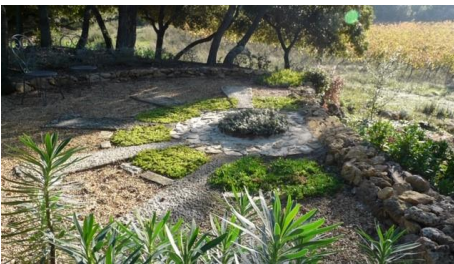
FEBRUARY 2022

Dear members and friends,

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES IN FRANCE

Thursday 28 April, 11.00am, Le Barroux, Vaucluse

A visit to two gardens of MGF members



Hedwige Lauwaert and Paul Kiekens write:

“Our garden is now four years old. We followed the planting layout and concept of our Belgian garden designer and transformed a mainly wooded piece of land, with hardly a view, into grounds laid out in terraces and open to the surrounding landscape. The garden is still a work in progress.”



Tony Stone is a photographer, and together with renowned garden designer, Anthony Paul, he has created a magical mix of sweeping panoramas, beautiful plantings and perfectly framed views. Tony has a love of land art and as you follow the winding paths through the garden you will admire many thoughtfully placed contemporary sculptures.

Photo (Clive Nichols): The view from La Jeg towards Mont Ventoux

To book a place for the visit to these two gardens contact [Hedwige Lauwaert](mailto:Hedwige.Lauwaert@mgf.fr).

Wednesday 11 May, Vers-Pont-du-Gard, Gard

MGF Annual General Meeting



We are pleased to have been able to re-book Pont-du-Gard as a venue for the 2022 AGM. This UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its Roman aqueduct, built in the first century AD to carry water to the city of Nîmes, will be a splendid place for us to get together again, two years later than originally planned.

We will hold our meeting in the morning, followed by lunch at the Les Terrasses restaurant. In the afternoon there will be a guided visit to the upper level of the bridge for up to 30 participants, or members can explore the extensive site with its thousand-year-old olive trees, botanical garden, preserved Mediterranean landscape (Memoires de Garrigue) and a 19c charcoal kiln.

Planning is underway and a booking form will be circulated in March.

Other plans for Spring/Summer 2022

Gardens in Var (dates are provisional)

5 May	A visit to La Campagne Ste-Marie and a garden belonging to MGF members in Tourrettes
25 May	A visit to Le Jardin du Real at Puget Ville
2 June	A picnic in a members' garden in Ste Maxime

Gardens in Aude

We are hoping to have a two day outing in early June, including visits to the gardens of Château Capitoul, near Narbonne, designed by James Basson, and to Daniel Fiala's garden in Tourreilles, south of Limoux.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Plant fairs and open gardens 2022

29/30 January	Mimosalia	Bormes-les-Mimosas (Var)
4 -6 February	Salon des Orchidées	Vergèze (Gard)
5/6 February	Fête du Mimosa	Sainte-Maxime (Var)
12 -27 February	Fête du Citron	Menton (Alpes-Maritimes)
5/6 March	L'art des Jardins	Ille-sur-Têt (Pyrénées-Orientales)
13 March	Festival des Plantes et de la Nature	La Redorte (Aude)
26/27 March	Fete des Jardins	Antibes (Alpes-Maritimes)
2/3 April	Plantes rares et jardin naturel	Sérignan-du-Comtat (Vaucluse)

Hortus Programme

All MGF members are welcome to join Hortus activities. For more information about Hortus, go to the [website](#). To book a place for any of the events in the Hortus programme, contact [Chantal Maurice](#).

NEWS AND INFORMATION

New on the website



[Is there an alternative to box?](#)

In less than 30 years, box blight and box tree caterpillar have devastated box hedges across Europe. David Bracey asked members for their experiences of growing alternatives – evergreen/ever grey plants with small leaves and compact habit, capable of withstanding Mediterranean - climate conditions. Read his article to see which plants members recommend.

Photo: Le Jardin de La Louve



[Visite de la Pépinière Quissac](#)

In October we visited Pépinière Quissac for a talk about pomegranates - which varieties to choose, how to cultivate them, how to prepare them and how they can be used. The talk was followed by a tasting session.

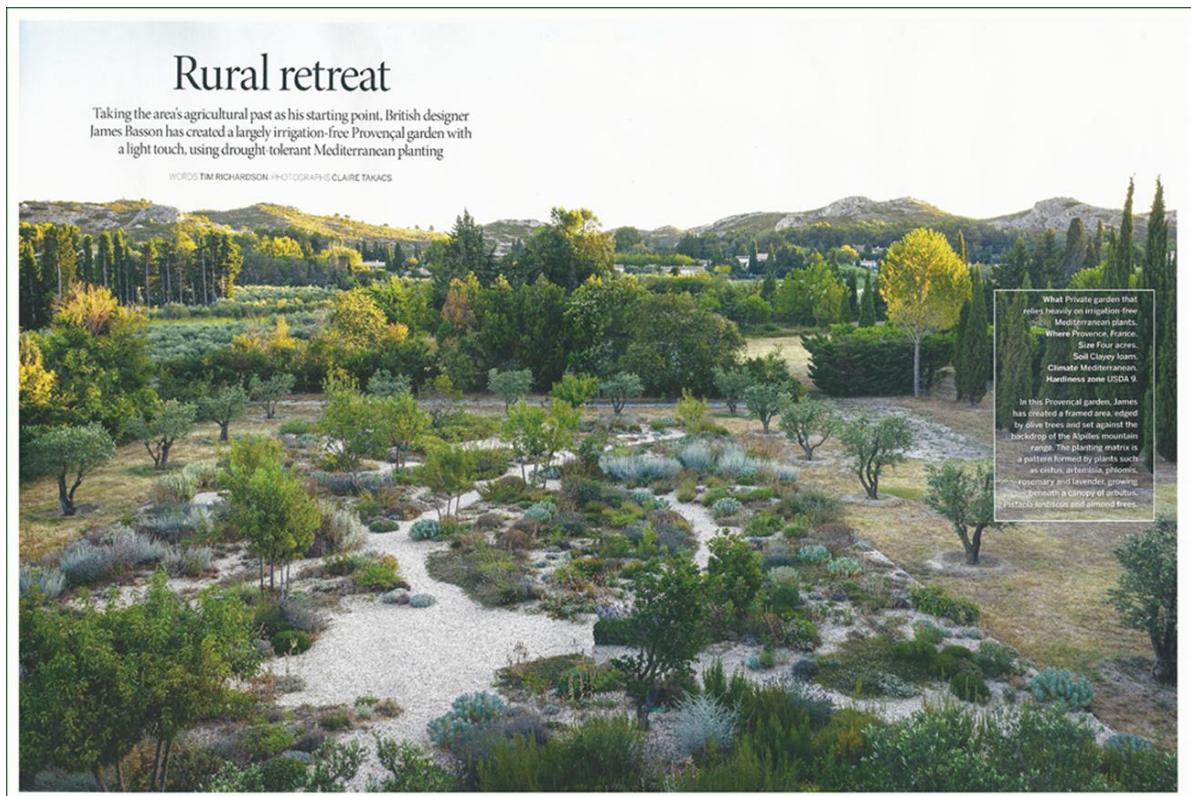
Nanouk Pelen took photographs and wrote a report.

Seed collection – January 2022 update

The [MGF seed collection](#) has been extensively updated with the addition of more than 80 new species. Thank you to all who donated seeds and to the many members who sent photos to illustrate the list.

Article in Gardens Illustrated magazine

The January edition of the excellent British magazine, Gardens Illustrated, has an article about a garden near Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, designed by James Basson and owned by one of our members. We visited the garden in May 2018, shortly after it had been planted. It is interesting to see how the garden has matured over three years - compare the photos in our [website account](#) to these recent photographs taken by Claire Takacs. The words in the magazine article are by Tim Richardson and can be viewed more easily in the website version of this newsletter.





Scapes Design, the studio headed by British designer James Bowen, has made a name for itself on the Côte d'Azur. Its gardens echo the traditional 'border with everything' style of the region, replacing it with a vocabulary of rough Mediterranean plants selected to combine and thrive in the dry conditions. The concept of the plant community is now well established in gardening, but it's not always a matter of attempting to replicate the local wild habitat. The garden near Saint-Jermy-de-Provence, which James created with Helen Bowen and Franco Terzi, shows that agricultural history can have just as potent an influence on the look of the setting for a domestic garden.

"There is a lot of abandoned agriculture in the area," says James. "The property is surrounded by olive groves, with a backdrop of the Alpilles. It's a mix of the agricultural and the natural – almost a workaday look, with self-seeded olive trees in abandoned fields. In the garden, we have introduced it and evolved it, elaborated upon it and enriched it. Think of the garden, you can see that the habitat is simpler and less dramatic."

James explains that the natural landscape of the valley, set below the dramatic limestone peaks of the Alpilles, would originally have been mixed woodland, periodically inundated with water as it is on a flood plain, with willows, alders and poplars. But this was later replaced by agriculture: the olive, nut tree and old grassland that are there today.

"The landscape memory is grass meadow," he says, adding that the problem with pasture in the Mediterranean is that it looks "very sad and brown" in summer. "There is no oxygen or flowering quality to it," he continues. "Instead we are trying to use the palette of plants that we have become known for. We are used to working on very rocky and barren landscapes, but this part of Provence is different – very flat, very usable ground."

The thicket farmhouse is a modern replica of a traditional dwelling, set in a four-acre plot. The owners, who are keen horticulturalists, wanted to make a garden that reflected the local landscape as much as possible, a place "to learn in as they garden." As James reflects: "That's a very rare thing – a client who is actually asking to do the gardening." Hence said

Above Tonnes of gravel were added to the soil, partly to encourage self-seeding while *Scabiosa* berries were modified to vary the terrain. Almost 200 trees, with *Euphorbia rigida* at their bases, were planted as bare-root specimens in clusters, to mimic agricultural practice.



There is a baseline of repeated genera but we riff on them

that James' own team of "artistic gardeners" he calls them, descend on the property four times a year to check on the maintenance regime, which is so important when any attempt is being made to replicate a plant community.

The key decision was to create a principal garden area at once remove from the house as a rectangle of planting, set against the mountain backdrop, strongly defined by steel edging and 'framed' by a both of grass and mature olive trees. Within the rectangle, James has instigated a planting regime that mixes fast- and slow-growing plants. "There is a baseline of repeated genera but we riff on them," he says. "So we have at least 15 different species or cultivars of lavender, 20 varieties, six rosemarys, a dozen samolax and so on. There are underlying themes, but also huge diversity within each genus. The basic idea is that this evolving landscape will take maybe 30 years to come into its full form."

The faster growing plants include *Teucrium flavum*, *Euphorbia rigida*, *Chrysanthemum sepioides* (formerly *Callitriche sepioides*) and *Achillea millefolium* – according to James these are "much more herbaceous and in the first years are putting over a show they fill the ground and keep the weeds down." Then there are faster growing sub-shrubs, such as *Salvia columbiana* and *Samolax repens*, which James is hoping will self-seed. Slower plants include *Asperula phoenicea* and *Phacelia lutea*, or music vine. Then, above it all are the small trees that play in to the landscape locale – *Pinus arbuscula*, *Arbutus unedo* and clusters of dwarfed trees. These larger plants will soon require close monitoring. "We don't want them to become overbearing, so that they eradicate the diversity. If we are not careful, it might become a small woodland, not this dramatic sub-shrubland."

Around the house is a band of planting that follows the same prescriptions, with some variation in the shrub area. Early large areas of grass have been retained, but this "band" is never entered. "If it goes brown, it is totally relevant," James says. "It's when it is watered and green that it becomes irrelevant – and also unwanted practice."

Above In the courtyard space in front of the house, a fountain pool provides the refreshing sound of water. The planting is designed to appear self-seeded and naturalistic, with *Teucrium flavum* thriving beneath the evergreen oak in the corner.

USEFUL INFORMATION
Find out more about Scape Design's work at scapedesign.com/en

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The steel edge of the 'framed' garden creates a defining boundary, with the grass and olives surrounding it. The planting includes hummocks of *Santolina*, lavender and thyme – the greys and silvers creating interest in high summer when there is little flowering – with *Neurium triflorum* in the background and a favourite rosemary, 'Mist Missop's Upright'.

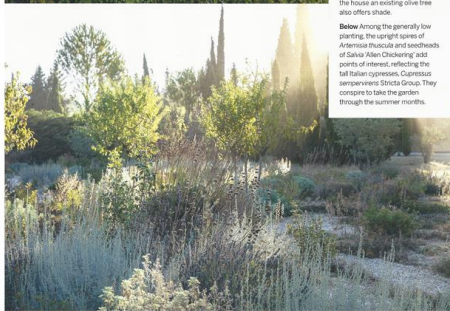


Above The principal garden area is set slightly away from the house, with planting kept low to create what James describes as a 'ha-ha' effect. He has used almond trees, in clumps to create a canopy, with the eyes drawn down towards lower planting, including banks of several kinds of lavender.

Below Seats in the shade of an olive tree are surrounded by tall planting that includes *Chrysanthemum monchii*, *Salvia*, *Artemisia*, *Phillyrea angustifolia* and *Phlomis italica*. Below these, *Crataegus bava*, *Achillea umbellata* and *Parthenocissus* have proved successful groundcover.



Above A hedge of *Viburnum tinus* helps to frame the area by the front door. To the side is a specimen nettle tree, *Urtica dioica*, which James uses as a shade tree in place of the more predictable 'plane' which near the house an existing olive tree also offers shade.



Below Among the generally low planting, the upright spires of *Artemisia tridentata* and *Senecio* of *Salvia Allen Chickering* add points of interest, reflecting the tall fescue grasses. *Cuscuta semperverens* *Strida* Group. They compete to take the garden through the summer months.



Growing small yellow flowering trees



Pierre Bianchi, a member of MGF writes:

Besides *Caesalpinia gilliesii*, well known and easy to grow, other small trees can be tried

Parkinsonia aculeata (Jerusalem thorn) is only found in the orange zone in France, which leaves some doubt as to its hardiness. It is easy to grow, but it must be trained to grow tall because its small thorns, though not too sharp, can catch those who approach it too closely. Its yellow flowers are light but interesting. The tree is resistant to drought and limestone.

Photo: *Parkinsonia aculeata* (Banco de Datos de Biodiversidad de Canarias)

I also grow *Leucaena retusa* (golden lead tree), which flowers in large yellow clusters. It is sufficiently hardy to grow in the olive tree zone. It can lose its foliage if the summer is very dry.

Photo: *Leucaena retusa* (P. Bianchi-Jardin l'Oasis)

Another possibility is *Geoffroea decorticans*, native to Chile and Argentina.

Note. The MGI seed collection has seeds of *P. aculeata* which can be ordered from Chantal Guiraud.

FROM OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Mediterranean Plants and Gardens (MPG)

MPG in the UK is planning to go ahead with some of its previously planned tours. The tour to Sicily, originally planned for May 2020 will now take place in May 2022 (11-18 May). More information on the [MPG website](#)

A few places are expected to be available. Please contact madalynhughes56@aol.com to check availability.

California Horticultural Society

Cal Hort arranges regular online presentations from Mediterranean-climate gardening experts. MGF members are invited to attend 'live' but as they take place at 03.30am French time it is likely to be more convenient to watch the recording on YouTube.

The January speaker was Cristóbal Elgueta, who led a virtual tour of gardens throughout Chile which demonstrate the application of natural principles in making gardens, including plant communities that mix horticulture, ecology, landscaping, architecture and conservation.

You can watch the Cal Hort presentations on their YouTube channel [California Horticultural Society - YouTube](#).

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](#).

The "What is it?" in the December Newsletter (proposed by Monique Mirès) was a ripe fruit of a tree peony with seeds.



The new "What is it?" is proposed by David Bracey. A clue: the shape of the flower will give you the vernacular name. Answer in the next newsletter.



MY FAVOURITE PLANT

You are welcome to send a picture of the plant that you hate or of your favourite plant (rare or common), accompanied by a short text, to be published in this newsletter. Contributions should be sent to [Roland Leclercq](#)



One of our members, Claude Marizy, writes:

Yucca, a plant of the past and the future

Faced with climate change, it is timely to review the way we garden, to encourage biodiversity, and to experiment with new and exotic plants. Amongst the genus to keep in mind, I would suggest the yucca, native to Northern Mexico and several states of the USA. Introduced to Europe more than 400 years ago, it has acclimatised and become part of our landscape. It can withstand temperatures from -20°C to +40°C (or even higher), tolerates many months of drought, removes heavy metal pollution and hydrocarbons from the air and soil, and stabilises soil against erosion. It is also very long-lived. Dry or liquid extracts from *Yucca gloriosa* or *Y. schidigera*, rich in saponins, are used in animal and human food, and in disinfectants, cosmetics, hygiene products, para-pharmaceuticals and medicine.

A horticulturist by trade, I moved to the Gers in 1983. Passionate about yuccas, I undertook research and experiments to discover the extraordinary potential of this plant. Among other things, one can prepare fertiliser from the juice and fibres (www.izotevallee.fr).

In 2020, I terraced a sloping plot of land using a centuries-old Mexican technique. The edge of the terrace is planted with yuccas. Their root systems stabilise the soil and the vertical face is strengthened with a 'concrete' of fibrous earth. No need for a dry stone wall or other supporting material, expensive to install.

If you have any questions or information to share with me, please contact me, in French, by [email](#). After reading this article, when you come across a yucca, I wouldn't be surprised if you look at it differently.

Photo : *Yucca gloriosa*

AND FINALLY

The spring wind has become a sculptor in the orchard, so that by its art, each tree takes on the appearance of a doll. (Onsori Balkhi, 970-1039, Persian poet)

Best wishes

Roland Leclercq

Newsletter editor

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