

HORTUS IN THE CURRENT MIDDLE AGES

WHAT IS A MEDIEVAL GARDEN?

Medieval gardens were usually **enclosed** and designed for **use + meaning**—food, medicine, household needs, and spiritual or symbolic ideas.

Hortus (synonyms pomerium, viretum, viridarium) – Latin for garden; also known as kitchen gardens

Hortus conclusus – Latin for enclosed garden. The depiction of this garden in Christian art from the middle ages on was intended to signify purity

- Frequently shows walled and show Mary
- Associated with the garden of Eden

COMMON MEDIEVAL GARDEN TYPES

- **Cloister Garth: sheltered courtyard space for reflection w/in monastic complexes**
A central lawn with a fountain or well, enclosed by arcades in monastic centers. Used for contemplation.
- **Kitchen Garden:** vegetables, 'potherbs', etc.
Rectangular raised beds, narrow paths, herbs and vegetables, often fenced with wattle to keep out animals.
- **Physic (Medicinal) Garden:** plants used for remedies & household preparations
Organized by plant use: remedies, ointments, teas
 - *Hortus Medicus*
 - *Hortus siccus*
- **Orchards & Vineyard Plots**
Fruit (apple, pear, quince, medlar) + shade/workspace + grazing edges
 - Sometimes medicinal trees
 - Commonly linked to monastic self sufficiency

DESIGN FEATURES: “THE MEDIEVAL LOOK”

- Many (especially monastic) gardens were enclosed
 - Walls, hedges, fences
 - For protection (keep out animals as well)
 - Has a symbolic meaning
 - *Hortus conclusus*
- Tend toward symmetry, measured and geometric
- Raised rectangular beds
 - Made of wood, stone, wattle, etc.
- Paths cross at right angles
 - Tend to have paths meet in the middle and used gravel or wood chips

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- Paths consisted of gravel or chipped wood
- Path sizes varied depending on location
 - Contemplative gardens had a bit wider paths for walking
 - Kitchen gardens would have narrower pathways to maximize planting
- Used natural materials like wood, stone, etc.
- Most included some kind of fountain, well or water feature
 - Usually centered in the garden

MODERN CONSIDERATIONS FOR A MEDIEVAL GARDEN

➤ **Enclosures**

- Fences vary across the US so consider what will work in your area
- Hedges
 - Do you want evergreen or deciduous?
 - Look for what will grow in your area
 - Consider the amount of care you want to deal with
 - Water, soil amendments, trimming, disease potential

➤ **Raised beds** – recommended as easier to amend soil as needed

- Wooden beds will eventually rot even with treated lumber
- Could use stones/cinder blocks for a stone raised bed
- Metal beds can be painted to look like wood or build a surround

➤ **Pathways**

- Spacing between raised beds need to be enough for your purposes
- Mine are 2' to 3' for ability to crouch and pull a cart through them for mulch/soil
- Gravel is more expensive but more permanent option
 - Make sure to remove grass, cover with cardboard, heavy duty landscape material before placing gravel
 - Consider adding sand down first and then cover with gravel
- Chipped wood or mulch is less expensive but needs to be replaced every year or so
 - Make sure to remove grass, cover with cardboard, heavy duty landscape material before placing gravel
 - Chipdrop.com is a great place to get larger chipped wood for free

➤ **Soil preparation**

- Medieval beds used compost, manure, and kitchen waste
- modern equivalent is organic matter

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WHAT GREW IN MEDIEVAL GARDENS

Capitulare de villis (c. Charlemagne, ~800) lists around 100 plants to be grown on his royal estates/gardens.

"Capitulare de villis" "It is our wish that they shall have in their gardens all kinds of plants: lily, roses, fenugreek, costmary, sage, rue, southernwood, cucumbers, melons*, gourds, kidney-bean*, cumin, rosemary, caraway, chick-pea, squill, gladiolus, tarragon, anise, colocynth, chicory, ammi, sesili, lettuces, spider's foot, rocket salad, garden cress, burdock, penny-royal, hemlock, parsley, celery, lovage, juniper, dill, sweet fennel, endive, dittany, white mustard, summer savory, water mint, garden mint, wild mint, tansy, catnip, centaury, garden poppy, beets, hazelwort, marshmallows, mallows, carrots, parsnip, orach, spinach, kohlrabi, cabbages, onions, chives, leeks, radishes, shallots, cibols, garlic, madder, teasles, broad beans, peas, coriander, chervil, capers, clary. And the gardener shall have house-leeks growing on his house. As for trees, it is our wish that they shall have various kinds of apple, pear, plum, sorb, medlar, chestnut and peach; quince, hazel, almond, mulberry, laurel, pine, fig, nut and cherry trees of various kinds. The names of apples are: gozmaringa, geroldinga, crevedella, spirauca; there are sweet ones, bitter ones, those that keep well, those that are to be eaten straightaway, and early ones. Of pears they are to have three or four kinds, those that keep well, sweet ones, cooking pears and the late-ripening ones

Tacuinum Sanitatis (14th century) - Lavishly illustrated scenes showing real-time harvesting of vegetables, herbs, fruits

WHAT WILL GROW IN THE U.S.?"

PLANT ZONE HARDINESS

- Zones are based on the winter temperatures of an area
 - Each zone covers a 10 degree range
- This is to help determine if a plant can survive the winters in an area
- Why Zones Matter?
 - Perennials, shrubs & Trees can come back year after year so need to be able to survive and thrive in winter climates
 - Annuals & vegetables – frost dates matter here and are specific to zones
 - Microclimates in your yard are also a factor
 - Sun exposure, wind, urban heat islands, etc.

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ZONE	Ave Minimum Winter Temp	Sample Hardy Plants
3	-40 to -30 F	Extremely cold-tolerant perennials & early crops that can handle harsh winters (Peonies, Delphiniums, Columbines)
4	-30 to -20 F	Cold-hardy flowers & shrubs thrive w/ reliable snow cover for insulation (Lilacs, Coneflowers, Hellebores)
5	-20 to -10 F	Protect tender shoots from late frost (Bleeding Heart, Astilbe, Coral Beels)
6	-10 to 0 F	Mixed gardens of perennials, shrubs & hardy ornamentals (Hydrangeas, Sedum, Black-eyes Susan)
7	0 to 10 F	Mild winters allow for some tropicals & flowering shrubs (Lavender, Camellia, Crepe Myrtles)
8	10 to 20 F	Warmer climate supports evergreen shrubs, citrus, & long-blooming ornamentals (Gardenia, Fig tree, Agapanthus)
9	20 to 30 F	Tropicals, succulents and heat-loving plants w/ some annuals growing year-round (Citrus, oleander, Bougainville)
10+	30 F+	True tropical climate w/ lush foliage & exotic flowers year-round (Banana, Bird of Paradise, Hibiscus)

Keep in mind plants can live in different regions during different times of the year.

8b (D/FW Texas) can seed/plant cold tolerant flowers in the fall for spring blooms. Plants will be done around May or so when the weather starts to get hot.

Northeast & Upper Midwest (Zones 3–5)

- Great for hardy medieval herbs: sage, thyme, mint, chives.
- Medieval vegetables thriving here: brassicas, onions, peas.
- Tender Mediterranean herbs (rosemary, bay) must overwinter indoors—just like medieval northern monasteries using pots for tender species.

Mid-Atlantic & Upper South (Zones 6–7)

- Excellent “balanced zone” for most medieval plants.
- Can grow rosemary as a perennial in many areas; lavender and many flowers naturalize well.
- Cool-season fall gardens reflect medieval seasonal scheduling.

Deep South & Gulf (Zones 8–9)

- Many medieval leafy greens and brassicas perform better as **fall-winter gardens** due to heat.
- Many flowers are also fall planting for early spring appreciate but gone by heat of summer

Southwest & Interior West (Zones 5–9 depending on altitude)

- Challenges: heat + drought.
- Medieval drought-tolerant candidates: rosemary, sage, savory, fennel.

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- Requires irrigation strategies because medieval European rainfall patterns differ from Arizona/Colorado.

West Coast (Zones 7–10)

- Excellent for Mediterranean herbs and medieval orchard species.
- Avoid high-summer heat stress for cool-season brassicas; plant fall–winter.

➤ Sun needs: _____

➤ Water needs: _____

➤ Planting season (cool/warm): _____

➤ USDA zone notes (if perennial): _____

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Seed Starting

Sources:

- Botanical Interest - www.botanicalinterests.com
- Ferry-Morse - <https://ferrymorse.com/>
- Johnny's seeds - www.johnnyseeds.com/
- Baker Creek Seeds - <https://www.rareseeds.com/>
- TomatoFest - <https://www.tomatofest.com/>
- Burpee - <https://www.burpee.com/>
- Seed Therapy - seedtherapy.com/

Indoor Seed Starting

- Plant Lights (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07LGTJQ2S?tag=dallasgarden-20&th=1>)
 - I use small bungee cords to help raise/lower lights easier than chains included with lights (https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0D9CZ7Q2L?ref_=ppx_hzsearch_conn_dt_b_fed_asin_title_3)
- Miracle Growth Cactus, Palm & Citrus Potting Mix (not seed starter mix)
- Vermiculite
- Seed starting trays
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07R9S38VX?tag=dallasgarden-20&th=1>
 - https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07BLRZQW?tag=dallasgarden-20&ref_=as_li_ss_tl
- Heating mats (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B074753J5V?tag=dallasgarden-20&th=1>)
- Garden marker (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01FOG9KWI?tag=dallasgarden-20>)
- Plant tags (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01HTDDFKW?tag=dallasgarden-20&th=1>)

Other Recommended Supplies

- Espoma Bio-Tome Starter
- Moisture Meters
 - https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07DM4LS1D?ref_=ppx_hzsearch_conn_dt_b_fed_asin_title_5&th=1
 - https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0C7GXZLVK?ref_=ppx_hzsearch_conn_dt_b_fed_asin_title_5&th=1

Fertilizers

- Microlife Multipurpose 6-2-4 Fertilizer
- Espoma is a great fertilizer with different applications
- FoxFarm Happy Frog series

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- <https://www.medievalcookery.com/>
- <https://www.medieval-recipes.com/medieval-garden/vegetables-salad/>