



Just the term *cottage garden* conjures up visions of quaint dwellings with thatched roofs and front yards bursting at the seams with plants and flowers. These charming gardens originated in England and throughout Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries and belonged to the working class. They began as a vegetable patch and an area for useful flowers and herbs. Roses, lavender, wallflowers, jasmine, foxglove, and stocks were grown for medicinal purposes or to attract bees. Ornamental plants were added in the 1860's when landowners insisted that the rural poor "prettify" their homes.

Cottage gardens are created for the gardener's own pleasure. There are many ways to describe a cottage garden, but one word says it all...

...unselfconsciousness.... These gardens are not trying to be anything, to show anything other than a single person's love of flowers.... These gardens are not created for anyone else.... Cottage gardens help us to remember the things that matter, to keep in mind that beauty goes beyond taste and beyond style. They remind us all....that the only reason to garden is for love.

— *America's Cottage Gardens* by Patricia Thorpe and Eve Sonneman

Although the garden may appear to be an unplanned mass of riotous color, there are a few underlying similarities that characterize what we now think of as a cottage garden.

Design

Cottage gardens appear disorganized — but they're not. They appear unruly because garden design principles are not strictly followed. A cottage garden is a very personal garden and the overall design plan is not always apparent. However, a few basic design principles still apply:

- Taller plants should be located in the back so as not to block the view of smaller plants.
- Consider planting in groups of odd numbers; 1, 3, 5, etc.
- You may also want to group plants in drifts running parallel, perpendicular and diagonal to each other.
- A cottage garden is up close and personal. There are no empty spaces, no vistas.

The Path	Originally, the path served a very useful purpose. It would guide you to the front door. Today the path helps create the shape of the garden and allows access to crowded planting areas. There may be a main path plus stepping-stones to more remote areas of the garden. The path can be made of natural or weathered materials: gravel, stone, shredded bark, dirt.
Edibles and Ornamentals	A cottage garden was functional, not just ornamental. Space was limited and back yards nonexistent. There was no place to hide the vegetable garden, so the two were combined.
Fenced	Traditionally the garden was fenced. The fence served as a boundary line between properties. They were not solid, privacy fences, but rather short, open and friendly, like a picket fence. An open fence allows for better air circulation and is an invitation to neighbors to stop and chat. It is also hard to get that “bursting at the seams” look without some boundary to spill over.
Climbers	Climbing plants were used to maximize space. Vines were trained to climb the house, fence, and over and through other plants.
House	The house served as one wall of the garden and was typically covered with plants. Traditionally these cottages had no backyards and were on small lots. By growing plants on a wall of the house, sunlight reached lower plants that might otherwise be blocked from the sun.
Plants	“True cottage gardeners don’t select their plants for what is ‘appropriate.’ They simply grow what they want to grow.” (Thorpe and Sonneman 19). Use perennials, herbs and re-seeding annuals. Vegetables also have a place in a cottage garden. Flowers should be old-fashioned. If it reminds you of your grandmother, it probably belongs in the cottage garden. Always remember: plant what you like.
Color	A cottage garden is not monochromatic. It screams with color, but the colors are generally traditional, old-fashioned. Some of today’s hybridized colors are not appropriate. Sure, orange belongs in the cottage garden, but on a marigold, not a rose.

A few other traditional features you may want to consider are; an arch over a gate or porch, a front door overgrown with honeysuckle and roses, or a simple topiary pyramid or sphere on either side of the front door.

As with any garden style, the cottage garden has advantages and disadvantages. In its favor, is the adaptability to virtually any shape of terrain, and the ability to achieve almost instantaneous results. A wide variety of plants allow for a longer flowering season. By growing plants close together, a ground cover affect is easily attained, thereby minimizing the need for weeding!

In spite of its appearance, it is not maintenance free. The unselfconsciousness of a cottage garden is not acquired without work. Depending on what plant material you use, it can be labor intensive and most cottage gardeners love the labor! Perennials require dividing, staking, deadheading and cutting back. A cottage garden requires a lot of “knowledgeable cultivation” (Thorpe and Sonneman 21) to grow many plants in a small place. However, the charming effect of having tall spikes of flowers against a house, blooms nodding over a containing hedge or fence, plants spilling onto a path, and climbers festooning a porch or wall are certainly well worth the effort.

Favorite Cottage Garden Flowers

Annuals

Many annuals re-seed and return year after year. Look for flowers, herbs, and seeds labeled “hardy annual.” Each garden is unique and plants that re-seed in one may not re-seed in another.

Bachelor's buttons	(<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>) 12-36 in. Early summer bloomer. Seed heads attract finches.
Balsam	(<i>Impatiens balsamina</i>) 12-36 in. Multitude of brightly colored flowers resembling roses occurring close to the main stem.
Belles of Ireland	(<i>Moluccella laevis</i>) 24-36 in. Chartreuse flowers.
Cleome	4-5 ft. Spider-like flowers. White, pink, purple.
Cosmos	1-6 ft. Large flowers. Yellow, orange, red, pink, white.
Geranium	(<i>Pelargonium spp.</i>) 4-16 in. Red, pink, lilac, white.
Larkspur	(<i>Consolida ajacis</i>) 6 in. – 4ft. Fernlike foliage. Early summer bloomer. Pink, white, violet-blue.
Love-in-a-mist	(<i>Nigella damascena</i>) 10-20 in. Fernlike foliage. Ornamental seed heads. Early summer bloomer. Blue, white.
Nicotiana	4-5 ft. on non-hybrids. Scented evening bloomer. White.
Rose campion	(<i>Lychnis coronaria</i>) 2 ½ in. Gray-green foliage. Early summer bloomer. Magenta, pink, white.
Snapdragon	(<i>Antirrhinum spp.</i>) 6 in. – 3 ft. White, yellow, pink, red, purple.
Sunflower	(<i>Helianthus annuus</i>) 1-12 ft. Blooms mid to late summer; Yellow, rust, orange.
Swan river daisy	(<i>Brachysome spp.</i>) 6-26 in. Yellow centers. White, blue, purple.

Climbers and Vines

Chinese wisteria	(<i>Wisteria sinensis</i>) Requires trellises, pergolas or other sturdy structure. Fragrant. Lavender.
Clematis	(<i>Clematis spp.</i>) Characteristics and culture depending on species. Many colors.
Climbing hydrangea	(<i>Hydrangea petiolaris</i>) Part shade. White.
Dutchman's pipe	(<i>Aristolochia macrophylla</i>) Shade. Green with yellow, purple and brown mottling.
Morning glory	(<i>Ipomoea tricolor</i>) Annual. Blooms summer through fall. Purple, blue, sometimes with white throats.
Scarlet runner bean	(<i>Kennedia prostrata</i>) Annual. Scarlet flower.
Trumpet creeper	(<i>Campsis radicans</i>) Orange. Can be very invasive.

Perennials

Allium	(<i>Allium spp.</i>) Blooms spring to fall depending on variety. 6 in – 5 ft. Pink, purple, white, blue, yellow.
Baby's-breath	(<i>Gypsophila spp.</i>) Blooms summer. 6 in – 4 ft. White or pink.
Bleeding-heart	(<i>Decentra spectabilis</i>) Blooms late spring, early summer. To 4 ft. Heart-shaped flowers. Pink and white. May die back to ground late summer.
Catmint	(<i>Nepeta spp.</i>) Blooms spring, early summer. 1-2 ft. White, blue, purple.
Columbine	(<i>Aquilegia spp.</i>) Zones 3-9. Blooms spring, early summer. 6 in – 4 ft. Wide range of colors. Tolerates shade.
Foxglove	(<i>Digitalis spp.</i>) Blooms summer. 2-5 ft. Pink, white, yellow, brown. Biennial but self-seeds freely. Part shade.
Hollyhock	(<i>Alcea rosea</i>) 5-8 ft. Biennial. Purple, pink, white, yellow.
Iris	(<i>Iris spp.</i>) Blooms spring, early summer. Up to 3 ft. Many colors.
Lavender	(<i>Lavandula spp.</i>) Blooms summer. 2-3 ft. Purple, blue, pink, white. Fragrant herb.
Lily	(<i>Lilium spp.</i>) Blooms spring and summer. 1-7 ft. White, yellow, red, orange, pink.

Ox-eye daisy or May daisy	(<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>) 12-30 in. Small version of Shasta Daisy. Freely self-seeds
Mallow	(<i>Malva alcea</i> or <i>Malva sylvestris</i>) 6 in. – 3 ft. Single 5-petaled flowers in shades of white, pink, blue or purple. Blooms in summer.
Money plant	(<i>Lunaria annua</i>) 2-3 ft. Blooms in late spring. Showy fruit develops in midsummer.
Peony	(<i>Paeonia spp.</i>) Blooms spring. 2-3 ft. White, pink, red.
Pinks	(<i>Dianthus spp.</i>) Blooms spring, summer. 3 in. – 2 ft. White, pink, red, lilac. fragrant.
Poppy	(<i>Papaver spp.</i>) Blooms spring early summer. 1-3 ft. Orange, red, pink, white, yellow.
Primrose	(<i>Primula spp.</i>) Blooms spring, early summer. 2 in. – 2 ft. Yellow, white, pink, purple, red.
Rose mallow	(<i>Hiniscus moscheutos</i>) Blooms summer. 4-8 ft. White, pink, red.
Sweet Rocket	(<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>) 12-36 in. White or lilac flowers. Blooms in summer.
Verbascum	Long bloom period. 1-3 ft. Grayish-green foliage. Yellow, sometimes white.
Verbena	(<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>) 2-3 ft. Deep purple flowers born on top of sparsely foliaged stems. Blooms summer to fall. Self seeds. Drought tolerant.
Veronica	(<i>Veronica spicata</i>) Blooms summer. 1-2 ft. Blue, pink, white.
Yarrow	(<i>Achillea spp.</i>) Blooms late spring, summer. 1-4 ft. White, pink, red, yellow.

Works Cited

- Childs, Jim. "Reseeding Annuals." *Garden Gate* December 2001: 18-21.
- Colborn, Nigel. *The Old-Fashioned Gardener, Lessons from the Past for the Gardener of Today*. New York: Lorenz Books, 1995.
- Engebretson, Don. "Creating the New Cottage Garden." *Garden Ideas and Outdoor Living* Spring 2001: 71-79.
- Lloyd, Christopher and Richard Bird. *The Cottage Garden*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1990.
- Steadman, Todd A. "Cottage Gardens." *Garden Gate* June 1998, 12-21.
- Strong, Roy. "A Traditional Cottage Garden." *An Introduction to English Gardening, a Supplement to The English Garden* 2000
- Thorpe, Patricia and Eve Sonneman, *America's Cottage Gardens*. New York: Random House, 1990

K-STATE

Research and Extension

Johnson County

Johnson County K-State Research and Extension
 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Suite. 1500
 Olathe, Kansas 66061-7057
 (913) 715-7000
www.johnson.ksu.edu

Garden Questions
garden.help@jocogov.org
 (913) 715-7050

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

K-State Research and Extension is committed to making its services, activities, and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability, please contact Johnson County Extension at 913.715.7000. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Rev.6/2015