

Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping

The GreenMan



A Shakespeare Garden

In a world where we are most often reflected in baseline demographics, gardening becomes a rare opportunity to express personal interests and creativity. Perhaps all that is wanted is a touch of inspiration. For that, what better source than Shakespeare? The bard's works overflow with flowers and botanical allusions, with magical moonlit glades, and with gardens as both settings and metaphors.

Shakespeare's lines have inspired composers, graphic artists, and garden designers for centuries. Today, Shakespeare Gardens appear across the globe, and in many forms, from the extensive 57,000 square foot garden at Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park in Montgomery, Alabama, to the more modest and secluded Elizabethan Garden on the east side of the Folger Shakespeare Library behind the U.S. Capitol.

A central element shared by all these gardens — and perhaps by yours as well — is a keen interest in the plants and plantings cited by the bard. Many of the plants are rich in cultural significance: from the plucking of the true white or blood red roses by the Plantagenet and Somerset forces in *Henry VI - Part 1*, to poor Ophelia's weedy trophies: the bitter nettles and "dead men's fingers" of *Hamlet*. Start your

Shakespearean garden by identifying plants mentioned in the plays and sonnets, and then research how and why they were selected. Books and websites abound with herbal lore, plant and garden history, and so forth. You will soon find that most all of the bard's "plant selections" have played important roles in medicine, history, religion, and literature.

Put Ophelia's rosemary ("that's for remembrance") in your garden and you are planting an herb valued by Egyptian priests, the classical physicians Dioscorides and Galen, monastic herbalists, and modern sous chefs. Each plant is endowed with centuries of meaning; let inspiration spring from Shakespeare and it will continue to flow into your garden.



To begin, select a basic design. For example, you could follow the lead of the Folger Library and create an Elizabethan knot garden: a formal arrangement, usually rectangular, with a bust of Shakespeare, a sundial, birdbath, or other sculptural component, surrounded by a interwoven pattern (a knot) of rosemary and lavender, with Johnny-jump-ups and other violet species, iris, saffron crocus, and chamomile filling the spaces between the knotted rosemary and lavender array. For a king's ransom, you might also include a low boxwood border.

Alternately, you could develop a Shakespearean herb garden, using some of the herbs already mentioned, as well as calendula, rue, fennel, hyssop, lemon balm, parsley, mint (in pots), savory, marjoram and much more. Or you might prefer a sunny flower garden, perhaps designed as an old-fashioned rose garden, or simply incorporating bard-related plants into an existing border. Favorite roses from Shakespeare's period include Damask and Gallica (French) or "apothecary's rose," and Musk and Eglantine (Sweetbriar) roses. Flowers include columbine, poppies, dianthus (clove pink or gillyflower), nasturtium, daffodils, calendula (pot marigold), and primula species, such as English Primrose and cowslips, which are often found throughout the works of Shakespeare.

For the truly inspired and literary-minded, you might want to develop a dedicated garden spot: perhaps "Titania's Bower" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Add a simple trellis, cover it with non-invasive honeysuckle (woodbine), some musk roses and other fairy plantings, and you're ready to sit, read, and ponder with Puck over the meaning of life and love.

You might also consider a bitter-sweet "Ophelia's Garden," focusing more on her bouquet of rosemary, pansies, fennel, and daisies (IV,v), than the crow-flowers and nettles of her fantastic, watery garland (V,vii). Though for good measure — and silver color — you could add Hamlet's wormwood (artemisia).

For more of a kitchen garden, you might borrow from Perdita's saucy lines at the shepherd's cottage in *The Winter's Tale* (IV,iv). The first several hundred lines are a pastoral shopping list, again reflecting some of the most common plants listed above. To add special meaning to your planting, you might even consider adding unique plant labels or homemade signs quoting from Perdita: for example, "Marigold [calendula], that goes to bed wi' the sun/And with him rises weeping," "Rosemary and rue; these keep/Seeming and savour all the winter long," and so on. Such signage can make your garden a poem itself, or transform a school, church, or public garden into an inspired educational experience.

In reflecting on your Shakespeare Garden, before selecting plants and garden motifs, remember that the experience will not only enrich your landscape and your appreciation of it, but will also, hopefully, introduce you to a larger cultural milieu. You should derive as much pleasure in thumbing through and reading the plays and poetry, as in actually planting the garden and enjoying its color, fragrance, and flavor. Understanding the plants in their literary context will help you better understand the civilization which created the literature itself. And suddenly, the Muses permitting, you will discover that your garden has become a doorway to a larger, older world.

Shakespeare's Plants

The following reflects plants cited in the Bard's writings provided as either common or botanic names; (spp) indicates numerous species within a genus.

Anemone
Aster (spp)
Astrantia
Basket of Gold
Borage
Broom
Chamomile
Clematis
Climbing Hydrangea
Columbine
Cowslip
Crocus (spp)
Cuckoo-Flower
Cupid's-dart
Curled Mallow
Dianthus (spp)
English primrose
Euphorbia (spp)
False Blue Indigo
Fennel
Fritillaria (spp)
Fulvous Daylily
Foxglove
Geranium
Hyacinth
Ilex (spp)
Iris (spp)
Lavender
Lungwort
Marigold
Meadow Buttercup
Mint (*Mentha* spp)
Monkshood
Narcissus (spp)
Oriental Poppy
Pansies
Peony
Rose (*Rosa* spp)
Rosemary
Rue
Sage (*Salvia* spp)
Santolina
Savory
Scabiosa
Spurge
Star-of-Bethlehem
Sweetpeas
Tarragon
Thyme
Tulips
Viola (spp)
Woodbine
Wood Fern
Yarrow
Yew (*Taxus* spp)



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