



The French Garden

Jean-Pierre Babelon, Mic Chamblas-Ploton

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The English garden, no matter how grand, is an outgrowth of nature, while the French garden, or "jardin a la francaise, " is a place of formality and grandeur. The origins of the latter are to be found in the Italian Renaissance, which sought inspiration in antiquity. Architects were hired for gardens for the first time, and expected to create a work of art by taming nature to their purposes. The French garden makes use, above all, of geometric design, symmetry, repetition of decorative elements, and perspective created by seemingly endless rows of trees, carefully tended paths, and man-made linear bodies of water, cascades, and fountains. The French garden is an intellectual conception that culminated with Andre Le Notre and the sumptuous and vast gardens he created for the Sun King at Versailles. The King, the court, and the newly rich all sought to express their power through the chateaux they built, inherited, or bought, as well as through the richness of the gardens that surrounded them on all sides. Into these, they integrated statuary by the great sculptors of the day, as well as stone and metal pavilions and other follies.

Versailles set the tone for Europe's palace builders, and thus it is no surprise that the French garden became part of every royal or aristocratic residence built since. For the first time, all the major French gardens have been gathered here in one book, all specially photographed over several years. Among the thirty-six seen here are Versailles, the Tuileries, Saint Cloud Marly, and Villandry in France, as well as Queluz in Portugal, Drottinghulm in Sweden, Peterhof near St. Petersburg, and Schonbrunn, the Habsburg Versailles. This is a major reference book that will delight travelers, gardeners, and historians.

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