

Education of a Gardener, Part 3

Physic and Rose Gardens

Looking at European garden designs and styles and then examining medieval gardens, one quickly learns that medieval gardens greatly influence all formal European gardens. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE (The Eastern Empire, aka, Byzantine empire continued to thrive until in 1453 it was conquered by Ottoman Turks) gardens and garden art in Europe virtually disappeared for nearly seven hundred years. During this medieval period, monasteries began to grow and since they had to be self-contained, they focused on growing food and medicinal gardens. Herbs of all kinds were grown for medicine. Monasteries were built around cloisters, which were either square or rectangular, and the medieval garden took the cloister's shape. Inside the cloister, some sub-divisions were also square or rectangular. Over time, these were further influenced by the Persian Charbagh. In the 1300s, cloister gardens became and remained the basis of European garden designs.



In 1996 when I started to plan for my current garden, I took a landscape design class in London taught by John Brookes. The classes were held at the English Gardening School, which is inside the Chelsea Physic Garden. Naturally, we spent time using the garden as both a learning tool and enjoyed it for strolling through. The garden was founded in 1673 by the Worshipful

Company of Apothecaries as a training ground for their apprentices. Its layout follows all the design elements of the cloister garden, and I was pleasantly surprised to see that the Physic garden also had a large number of roses. I had expected a lot of herbs, but of course, roses are used as an herb in many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East and southern Europe. Not only rose water but thyme, mint, anise, borage, basil and a whole slew of other herb waters are made and used for various remedies, from stomach ailments to cancer, minor relief to serious nursing. I have been lucky enough to see the harvest and making of rose water. The harvest is a joy to watch and to



participate in. The making of the rose water and all the other herb waters is also fun to watch and I am a real follower of using and benefiting from them as mild and gentle medicines for minor ailments. I took the lessons learned from visiting and studying at the Chelsea Physic garden and augmented it with the memory of the lovely fields of roses and the more modern version, as seen at the US National Arboretum's herb garden. These are real

inspirations for my relatively small rose and herb garden. Small and modest, as it is relative to these inspiring examples, my harvest is very rewarding. I jokingly call my concoction of vinegar and honey syrup, made more refreshing with orange blossom water, mint water, anise water and

a generous squirt of lime juice, Persian Gatorade. It works amazingly fast to help balance electrolytes, quench thirst and relieve mild sunstroke symptoms.