

1History

Arbors in the garden began thousands of years ago

Ancient Sumerians or Babylonians likely built these and related structures in the famous

Hanging Gardens of Babylon or in the ziggurats that they built and landscaped

Arbor comes from the Latin word for tree, indicating the structure's basic purpose of supplying the type of shelter a tree would give

These shaded retreats designed for repose are often constructed with built-in or movable seating.

The antiquated term "bower" is sometimes used interchangeably with arbor

The word, strictly speaking, denotes plant growth that forms a natural recess without the support of a structure such as a weeping tree

In ancient Egypt, tunnel-like structures were used to support grape vines

Although decorative pleasure gardens likely had arbors, they were primarily functional rather than decorative features

The arbor made its way to Greece and Italy, where the architectural influence of the Romans gave arbors new bold designs. The Romans added stone columns and ornamental busts as well as lattice and arched roofs. Although they were very decorative, they still were important to protect people from the hot Mediterranean sun.

In the Iberian peninsula the Moors designed many magnificent gardens. Because they came from the desert areas, they built their gardens to give protection from the sun by using vine-covered arbors. This style of gardens and the arbors and arches went with the early explorers and spread through most of the new world.

By the 16th century in Europe, arbors made with willow, ash or juniper branches and accented with fragrant flowering vines flourished in many different gardens. Throughout England they provided noble ladies with a retreat from the sun.

Garden Uses

Arbors in modern gardens may utilize design elements from many previous periods. Used correctly, they add beauty and ambience to any landscape or providing a leafy, shaded shelter as the name suggests.

Successful arbors, like all landscape structures need to be used in the right way in the garden. Some arbors can be used as focal points; as such they need to be designed to fit your garden style and be placed so plants and hardscapes emphasize them.

Arbors can be entryways into a garden room or into adjoining areas of the landscape. They can define the use of areas in the garden, tie together or separate gardens and direct garden visitors. One of the most successful uses of arbors is to link together the house and garden by providing an attractive welcome to your home.

Others arbors serve more as diversions. These are best tucked away among the plants so they will be the secluded getaways you are hoping for. Arbors can also double as shelters or privacy screens or hide unsightly features such as tool sheds, composters or woodpiles.

Their uses are almost endless. Use them to arch over pathways, provide a roof over a swing, spa, or hammock or shade a fireplace or a picnic table. or just use them as a wonderful place to display your favorite vining plants in the garden.

Arbors provide additional planting areas and create interesting vertical dimension for any garden.

Whether you have an informal English cottage-style garden, a formal European garden or a vegetable garden that you want to make more productive, an arbor might be just what your garden need to dress it up or solve some problems.

Graceful and romantic, practical and useful, arbors add a touch of elegance and relaxing ambience to any garden setting.

Materials

Traditional timbers have given way to a host of other construction materials. Lumber, wrought iron and other metals, plastic, galvanized pipe vinyl and many other materials are very effective. To be successful they must be strong, durable and able to support the type of plants to be grown on them.

Plants for Arbors

After the arbor construction is complete, the real fun of creating an arbor begins with choosing plant materials. Arbors cry out for vining and trailing plants.

To add fragrance to the arbor, choose trumpet vines, wisteria, honeysuckle or fragrant roses. Create a “jam and jelly” arbor by planting grapevines to grow a bountiful harvest of grapes for fresh eating or making preserves.

Vines do not automatically take to arbors. Like new puppies, vines must be trained. Tie the vines as they grow to the arbor structure with green plastic tape or strips of soft natural cloth.

Avoid wires or synthetic materials that may girdle the plants because they do not decompose. Once established, vines are generally disease-resistant problem free plants that require little maintenance beyond watering and occasional pruning.

Energy Conservation

Arbors and trellises covered with vining plants offer also very practical advantages of cooling shade. Arbors and slatted wooden overhead structures can be effective either attached or adjacent to the home or farther out in the landscape. If adjacent to the home, they will shade the walls and windows and reduce heat and glare and providing cool, restful sitting and viewing areas.

Other Garden Structures

Trellises

Trellises are constructed of strips of wood, metal or plastic crisscrossed to form diamond or rectangular latticework. Trellises can be fan shaped or any form that suits the allotted space and the plants.

Fences can be used as trellises to form a leafy perimeter around a garden. Freestanding trellises provide privacy screens or separate one garden space from another. Trellis walls can save space in the vegetable garden for edibles plants or bring in the fragrance of sweet peas or honeysuckles.

Archways

Archways are abbreviated arbors shaped like an inverted U. They are used as garden entrances and are often combined with gates. A series of vine-covered archways spaced at intervals along a sunny pathway creates a pleasant walkway.

Pergolas

Pergolas originated as shaded canopies over terraces or a shaded passageway from buildings to the garden in hot climates. Traditionally they are strong structures made of sturdy posts and substantial crossbeams for supporting vigorous plants.

Pergolas were known in ancient Egypt, and were common in Italian Renaissance gardens. Pergolas have not been as popular in northern countries where shade is less needed. In modern times, both arbor and pergola structures are called arbors.

Gazebos

Gazebos are small roofed pavilions designed to provide shade and a view of the garden. They originated as watchtowers in fortress walls. This 18th-century joke word, gazebo, combines gaze with the Latin suffix *-ebo* meaning "I shall".

Traditionally they are made with a solid roof and floors and seats while the sides are open. Historically these summer houses have not been used as plant support structures. Modern adaptations with an open grid roof and trellis walls are often used to support vines much like an arbor.