

## My Spanish Garden

### Marie Louise from Catalonia, Spain

Marie-Louise Wittlin grew up in Switzerland in a family with 'Green Thumbs'.

Many summer holidays were spent in Southern France and the gardens and the climate of the Mediterranean coasts held a special fascination for ML. Even as a teenager she dreamed of having a garden all year round.

As it turned out she spent most of her adult life in Canada and the dream was on hold until she and her husband decided to take early retirement and move to Southern Catalonia on the Mediterranean coast in Spain.

They live on a half ha property with olive, citrus and almond trees and lots of native shrubs, and gardening has been a great learning experience.



coastlines of course—hence the name, South Africa, the Chilean Coast, some places in Australia, and California.

**Native Mediterranean plants are drought resistant** and are well adapted to hot and dry summers and mild and moist winters. There are over 25,000 species of plants in all the Med. climate regions—so the choice is huge.

On our property I am working with and around old olive trees, almond and citrus trees that were already here before us—I want to keep them.



### Work *with* Nature- not against it.

A garden or front yard is like an extension of living space. A bare lawn is a living room without furniture and pictures- pretty boring and empty. It just sits there gobbling up water—but needs fertilizer and care—a big effort with no reward!

The **Mediterranean climate** is one of the best for gardening. There are only a few places on Earth with Mediterranean climate: the Mediterranean

The first thing I did was **check out local garden centres**. They know best what does well in the area—after all they want happy customers that come back for more....

Many plants sold here are native to the area, but they will grow well in California too: Rosemary, Thyme, different Sages, Calendula, Santolina (Lavender Cotton).

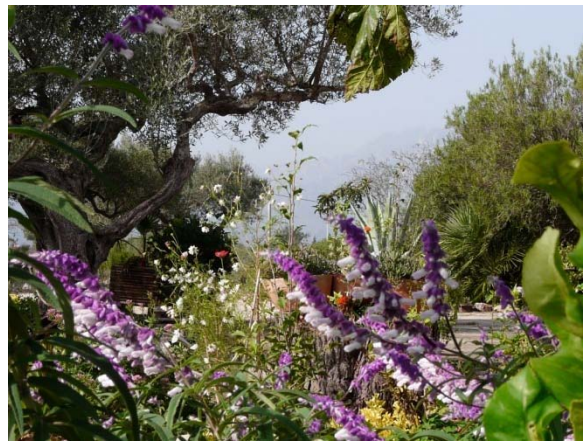
Popular plants from South Africa are Osteospermum (African or Cape Daisies), Geraniums Gazanias, etc.

Owning a property on a ridge means **exposure to strong, drying winds**. I paid attention to wind direction throughout the year, found the protected areas around the house, shady spots in summer, full sun all year long....this determined where different plants would do well.

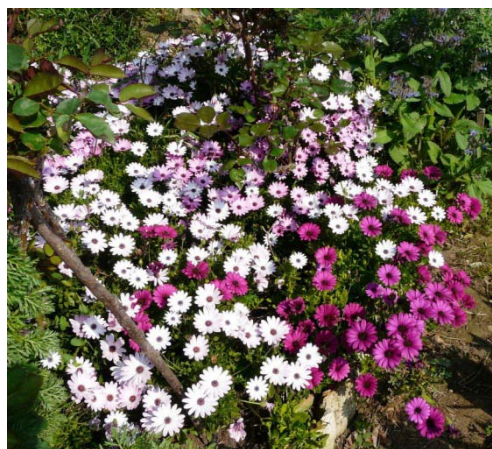
### **Formal or informal, that was the question**

A few **visits to parks and private estates** gave me some ideas. I liked **informal, the wild, country garden** with lots to see, colourful, rich in texture. There are books in libraries and instructions on the net on how to plan and set up a garden—it is easy to find ideas.

I **started out with lots of roses**, the old fashioned, disease resistant kind. They do well in full sun. Most roses need at least 6 hrs of full sun to do well- and once established they just need occasional watering.



I planted all the Mediterranean native herbs I could find in between the roses: **Rosemary, Thyme, perennial Tarragon, Sages, Verbena**.



I interspersed the herbs with Freesias, Montbretias, Gazanias, Osteospermum.

The trick is to **leave as little bare soil as possible. Bare ground dries out faster**. The plants will keep each other cool. All my plants are drought resistant and can take the drying winds. They do not bloom all at once, but there is always something interesting to see all year round.

**The maintenance is minimal**. We have a drip-irrigation system—we turn it on for one hour once a week during July and August unless there is a thunderstorm. The temps can reach 35-36C during the summer months. The garden can survive with less water, but the plants will go into a kind of dormant period until the rain, or the water starts again.

The garden is well established and **only needs occasional weeding and thinning, mostly in spring**. I take out some plants when they become too crowded and plant them again somewhere else—plus, I take cuttings to start new ones.

**Succulent plants** are ideal candidates for Mediterranean climate gardens. Some people love them, some hate them—many succulents do not have nasty spines and the flowers are gorgeous. Some are great as groundcovers (Sedum sp.), some are wonderful feature plants ( Yucca, Aloes, Agave) . The maintenance is just about nil. They can survive without water for an extended time.

Many people here have quite exotic looking gardens with succulents in beautiful urns and big clay pots, or in rock gardens....

**I planted succulents in places not covered by the irrigation system.**

**Plants and flowers in containers** are a great way to fill in spots in the garden, create a cozy corner on a deck or patio, or to create a privacy screen. I keep Hibiscus, Plumbago, Jasmin, Bay Laurel and several Rose of Sharon, pelargonium, geraniums, even some Cymbidium orchids in **terracotta pots**. I like to move them around so I can always see flowers—and that is what a Mediterranean Garden is about.

