



the evergreen garden

I love the lush look of gardens in Santa Barbara. What plants can I use to achieve the appearance and feel of a Santa Barbara-style garden here in Arizona?



Text by Troy Bankord • Illustration by Clint Miller

Unlike desert gardens of the Southwest, which rely to some degree on minimalist principles, the homes and gardens of Santa Barbara exude an aura of grandeur. Trees of enormous stature and opulently planted landscapes are a common sight. Clipped and topiaried shrubs and hedges evoke feelings of romance and formality. And combinations of different and unusual plant textures, colors and varieties create a style reminiscent of the Moorish gardens of Spain.

Many species that flourish in the temperate conditions of Santa Barbara also thrive in our extreme climate. For plants that do not fare well here, there are many desert-adapted substitutes that have a similar appearance to those used in the Santa Barbara area. Following are suggestions for creating a Santa Barbara-style garden:

- Large trees possessing soft-gray or dark-brown trunks, such as live oak, mesquite, sycamore and eucalyptus, can be planted to provide shade and to create the feeling of canopied outdoor rooms. Ficus, bottlebrush, olive, pistachio, Italian cypress and rosewood are other trees that can be utilized for shade or as accents where a vertical element is desired.
- Bougainvillea, ficus, fig vine, Banksia roses and even citrus trees can be espaliered against walls and anchored over windows, doors and archways to create focal points and visual interest.
- Hedges often are planted in layers and can be

incorporated as foreground and foundation plants; grown alongside walkways and the front of raised planters; installed around the perimeter of the property; and used to define outdoor spaces and vignettes. Recommended plant varieties for hedging include natal plum 'Tutteli', boxleaf euonymus, dwarf olive, dwarf myrtle and Japanese boxwood.

• Accent plants such as Mediterranean fan palm, agave and aloe specimens, yucca, tropical bird of paradise, pencil euphorbia, airy-looking types of juniper, and even tropical varieties of cactus such as Indian fig prickly pear (*Opuntia ficus indica*), Mexican fence post, and totem pole cactus are utilized for drama and interest in corners, in front of blank walls, and amid plant groupings.

• *Rhaphiolepis* (an evergreen shrub), roses, petite oleander, lavender, *Guara lindheimeri* (a perennial with tall flower spikes), dwarf olive, sage, salvia, rock rose, gopher plant, rosemary, bearded iris and zephyr (rain) lily are hardy varieties that can be planted en masse.

Even the most intricate of gardens can be achieved through simple means, and any of the plant species mentioned should be available at most Valley garden centers or nurseries. Also, keep in mind that many Santa Barbara gardens feature pools and water features. 🌿

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