

Origins of Garden Design

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An overview of how gardens have evolved from functional spaces to artistic expressions across cultures.

1. Early Functional Gardens (Pre-3000 BCE)

Region / Culture	Primary Purpose	Typical Features	Notable Examples
Mesopotamia (Sumer, Babylon)	Food production, irrigation experiments	Rectangular plots, water channels, raised beds	“Hanging Gardens of Babylon” (legendary)
Ancient Egypt	Kitchen gardens, medicinal herbs	Mudbrick walls, Nile-fed basins, shade trees (date palms)	Gardens of the Pharaohs at Amarna
Indus Valley	Household subsistence	Grid-like planting, drainage, early compost pits	Mohenjo-Daro garden remnants

Key point: Early gardens were **practical**—they supplied food, medicine, and raw materials, and their layout reflected the need for efficient water management.

2. Sacred & Symbolic Gardens (3000 BCE – 500 CE)

Culture	Religious / Symbolic Role	Design Elements	Representative Sites
Ancient Persia	Paradise (Eden) concept, royal prestige	Enclosed walled “paradises” (pairidaeza), water channels, fruit trees, pavilions	Persepolis pleasure gardens
Classical Greece	Philosophical contemplation, mythic symbolism	Symmetrical terraces, colonnades, groves of olive & laurel, scented herbs	Gardens of the Academy (Plato)
Roman Empire	Display of power, leisure, horticultural knowledge	Formal peristyle courtyards, atria, fountains, mosaics	Villa Hadrian (Tivoli)

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Culture	Religious / Symbolic Role	Design Elements	Representative Sites
Ancient China (Zhou?Han)	Taoist harmony, Confucian order	Rockerries, ponds, bamboo groves, scholar's rocks, calligraphic inscriptions	Imperial gardens of Chang'an
Mesoamerica (Maya, Aztec)	Cosmological alignment, ritual offerings	Raised platforms, water reservoirs, obsidian-lined pathways	Sacred precincts at Tikal

Key point: Gardens became **symbolic extensions** of religious belief, political authority, and philosophical ideas. Geometry, water, and plant symbolism were deliberately employed.

3. Medieval & Islamic Gardens (500?CE?–?1500?CE)

3.1 European Medieval Gardens

- **Monastic cloisters:** enclosed courtyards for contemplation; herbs for medicinal use.
- **Castle walled gardens:** utilitarian (kitchen, herb) plus ornamental (herbaceous borders, topiary).

3.2 Islamic Paradise Gardens

Feature	Function / Meaning
Chahar Bagh (four?part garden)	Represents the four rivers of Paradise (water, milk, wine, honey).
Water channels & reflecting pools	Symbolic purification; cooling climate.
Geometric layout	Manifest order and divine unity.
Plant selection	Citrus, pomegranate, roses—fragrance and fruit.

Key sites:

- **Alhambra** (Granada, Spain) – intricate waterworks, tile mosaics.
- **Shalimar Gardens** (Lahore, Pakistan) – terraced, axial design.

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Key point: The **Islamic garden** codified the idea of a terrestrial Paradise, influencing later European Renaissance designs.

4. Renaissance & Baroque Gardens (1500?CE?–?1700?CE