

Gardening for the Moon: My Latest Phase



Moonflowers, a type of morning glory, are an example of easy plants for your moon garden.

Gardening during a drought has its challenges but also forces our creativity in new ways. In order to gain maximum effect from the limited amount of water we use, I am contemplating converting an area to be a moon garden. Not only should this garden amortize our water usage by extending the total hours of pleasure it will offer, but also a moon garden will allow us to take advantage of the area's relatively warm nights and play off our love for outdoor entertaining. I am hoping this moon garden will perfume the night air as we walk from the house toward the back cabana and will glow magically against the dark of the night as we dine alfresco. I researched the history of moon gardens as well as the best practices for designing such a garden and have summarized those findings for visitors to Gamble Garden.

A moon garden is a garden to be enjoyed under the light of the moon. Most moon gardens contain nocturnally blooming flowers and flowers that fragrance the area at night. Other moon gardens consist primarily of white or very light colored flowers in ivory, cream and pale yellow or of silvery or variegated foliage so that in addition to being visible at night and enjoyable at dusk and

dawn, their flowers and leaves are also attractive in full daylight. Therefore, the same amount of water and gardening effort can be enjoyed for a longer period of time each day.

Moon garden descriptions can extend in several different directions depending on the gardeners' goals and the gardens' location. The most unusual description of a moon garden that I have found is NASA's: moon garden is NASA's planned scientific test to see if plants can live on and survive the high radiation levels of the moon's surface. NASA knows now that the moon has water on it but whether there is enough light for seedling germination and plant growth and therefore for humans to one day inhabit the surface of the moon for extended periods of time remain to be learned. If plants can survive then likely humans, who rely on plants for nutritional sustenance as well as psychological comfort, could survive as well. Granted these moon gardens will reside within a small 1 kg terrarium containing seedlings, filter paper to hasten germination, water and enough air for 5 to 10 days of growth. But apparently that is all that is needed to assess the feasibility of lunar gardening.

Although some credit the development of the moon garden to the Victorian Era, moon gardens have a history in mythology and folklore: Our ancient pagan ancestors used moon gardens to beautify the area for summer evening celebrations during which they worshipped their lunar deities. Moving forward in history about 350 years ago and still two centuries before the Victorians, the fifth Mughal Emperor of India, Shah Jahan, built "a moonlit pleasure garden" known as Mehtab Bagh which he frequently visited so he could gaze at night upon the Taj Mahal - the mausoleum he commissioned to honor his third and favorite wife, with whom he had 14 children, but who had died during child birth. From Mehtab Bagh's location across the Yamuna River and in perfect alignment with the Taj Mahal, he could best view its beautiful architecture. Mehtab Bagh was a Mughal-era garden of Persian style, square in shape and measuring about 300 meters by 300 meters, with white plaster walkways, airy pavilions, pools, fountains, and fruit trees. The Moonlight Garden was designed as an integral part of the Taj complex. Recently, the Moonlight Garden has made news as in July 2015, *Times of India* reported that archaeologists had discovered and were excavating the remains of a summer palace, or

baradari-like structure (a pavilion with outstanding acoustics and a sizeable space for hosting performances) likely commissioned by Shah Jahan in his once-prized Moonlight Garden.

Moving forward in history to the Victorian Era (1837-1901), moon gardens, also called dream gardens, were a favorite theme among gardeners. In addition to white and light colored flowers, the Victorian moonlighted gardens featured the heady, nocturnal aromas of tuberose and jasmine. Fragrance is considered one of the vital components of current day moon gardens.

Today moon gardens are reported to be enjoying renewed popularity. Pinterest, the popular American and European bulletin boarding site for sharing photographs and project ideas, has a section on moon gardens as does Houzz, a Palo Alto based interior and exterior home design website with an American, European and Australian following. This is not just a growing trend in the West that makes moon gardens popular: Even the United Arab Emirates is witnessing the rising popularity of moon gardens.

Why the surge in interest? A theory is that busy schedules and long commutes limit the opportunity of enjoying a garden during the day, so an increased crop of those holding day jobs are incorporating moon gardens into their site. Finally, coming full circle back to moon garden's spiritual beginnings, today's alternate religions which focus on nature-worship, like Wicca, have also given rise (so to speak!) to formal, spiritual purposes for moon gardens.

Ideally suited for quiet contemplation or leisurely nighttime strolls, moon gardens, like day gardens, should embody the primary components of hardscape and plantings. But a third component, artificial lighting, may also be added. Some consider the most important component of a moon garden to be the place where one may relax to enjoy the view. Whether in the middle of the garden or along an edge, the choice of seating location is personal. Those whose moon gardens will be enjoyed via strolling must decide whether to use reflective-style paving stones, light-colored sand or crushed limestone. Counterintuitively, even dark colored stepping stones have been used to offer the "illusion of walking on air or on top of holes" as in Northscaping.com's "The Art and Craft of Moon Gardens: Creating Magic and Mystery under the Moonlight". As my moon garden is to be enjoyed from afar, the

traditional hardscaping elements of stepping stones, benches and sculptures became less relevant. But water features, whose meditative gurgles could carry from the moon garden to our patio, would add another sensory dimension. Also the surface of the water could help reflect light to add more visual interest. The color of the hardscaping also is a consideration. A climbing flowering plant may look artificially suspended if it is growing up a dark-colored post; yet, that same darkness would effectively make the post disappear and allow the plantings to be the hero of the space rather than be over-shadowed by their support system. Focusing on the magic of the moonlight should keep your hardscape well balanced in the space.

Moon garden designers may believe they must opt for only natural light as I initially did. To my uneducated self, any use of artificial light would interfere with my intent to create a genuine moon garden. But as I learned more, I discovered that artificial lighting could enhance the effects of the moon. I also learned that there are actually very few evenings when the night sky is not covered by clouds and the moon is both bright enough in its cycle as well as in the proper location of the sky to showcase a moon garden at its finest. True, the lack of artificial light could offer a heightened sensory experience as it would allow garden visitors to rely more on their sense of smell and hearing but the downside is visitors' safety would not be taken into consideration. Finally, any moon garden that relies only on natural light must also include a place to sit: Eyes need some time to adjust to a lack of light before they can fully absorb what they see before them. And when they adjust, they will see that the flowers' light colors appear to glow at night and also seem to float in mid-air as the darker color of their stems disappears in the low light.

Moon gardens are meant to glow and shimmer in the darkness. You can create a night time paradise by selecting plants for your moon garden from these groups: plants with prolific white flowers, night bloomers, bright foliage (gold, chartreuse, variegated) or silvery leaves, night-scented flowers (where you'll brush up against them along the path or walk nearby them), and intensely fragrant blooms (be sure to include at least one). Also consider swishing grasses as sound may add dimension to the sensory delight of a moon garden.

If you're feeling the pull of the moon in your own yard, learn more about moon gardening in such books as "The Evening Garden: Flowers and Fragrance from Dusk till Dawn" by Peter Loewer or "Evening Gardens" by Cathy Wilkinson Barash as well as online. Get started now to especially enjoy your moon garden on this nights of this summer's full moons: June 20, July 19, August 18, and September 16.

IDEAS FOR PLANT SELECTION FOR A MOON GARDEN

PALE FLOWERS THAT GLOW UNDER THE MOONLIGHT

- Petunias
- Irises
- Lilies (daylily “Newberry White Dove”)
- Peonies
- Lily of the valley
- Yucca
- Baby’s breath
- Iceberg Roses
- White Digitalis
- Moonbeam Coreopsis

WHITE PROLIFIC FLOWERERS

- Azaleas
- Creeping Phlox
- Leucojums
- Daffodils
- Chysanthemums
- Hydrangeas
- Gaura
- Daisies (dwarf Shasta ‘Darling Daisy”)
- Magnolia Trees
- Flowering Pear

NIGHT BLOOMERS

- Evening Primrose
- Angel’s Trumpet
- Moonflower (also is night-scented)
- Nicotiana (alata)

NIGHT SCENTED FLOWERS

- Moonflower (can grow up to 12 feet in a season, provide trellis space)
- Evening Primrose
- Night Phlox
- Datura (poisonous)
- Honeysuckle
- Nicotina
- Night Blooming Jasmine
- Night Gladiolus
- Night Blooming Daylillies
- Garden heliotrope
- Angel's Trumpet (also very fragrant)

INTENSELY FRAGRANCED FLOWERS

- Flowering Tobacco
- Columbine
- Pinks
- Lilacs
- Easter Lillies
- Honeysuckle
- Mock Orange
- Four O'Clocks
- White Lillium
- Angel's Trumpet (like "Kyle's Giant White")

IDEAS FOR PALE PLANTS OFFERING MOONGLOW:

- Dusty miller
- Lamb's ear
- Wormwood (absinthe)
- Lavendar
- Hostas (variegated versions)
- Silver Artemisia (Powis Castle)
- Silver sage or thyme
- Silver carpet
- Sweet potato vine

- Golden oregano
- Variegated Kiwi
- White Eggplant
- White Pumpkins

Bibliography

<http://allthingsplants.com/thread/view/18411/Moon-Gardens/>

<http://www.northscaping.com/IZArticles/IS-0089>

<http://www.bhg.com/gardening/plans/colorful/design-for-a-moon-garden/>

<http://homeguides.sfgate.com/pollinates-night-blooming-cereus-59442.html>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/02/moon-garden-nasa-lunar-greenhouse-growing-plants-2015_n_4372698.html

<http://www.mookychick.co.uk/how-to/how-to-guides/how-to-make-a-night-garden-that-comes-alive-under-starlight.php>

<http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/special/spaces/moon-garden.htm>

<http://garden.lovetoknow.com/theme-gardens/moon-gardens>

<http://www.tellwut.com/surveys/lifestyle/living/65388-moon-gardens.html>

<http://prolandscapermagazine.com/the-uae-witness-rising-popularity-of-moon-gardens/>

<http://alabamaliving.coop/article/alabama-gardens-moon-garden/>

<http://www.psfk.com/2013/12/nasa-moon-garden.html>

<http://www.temeculalandscapeconstruction.com/are-you-dreaming-of-a-moon-garden/>

<http://www.fragrantica.com/perfume/Strange-Invisible-Perfumes/Moon-Garden-10948.html>

<http://www.plantersplace.com/features/feature/the-continuing-influence-of-the-victorian-garden-in-america/P1>

<http://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/archaeologists-uncover-summer-palace-moonlight-garden-opposite-taj-mahal>

<http://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/archaeologists-uncover-summer-palace-moonlight-garden-opposite-taj-mahal#ixzz3yfNZouca>