

LOS ANGELES— The Getty Villa’s gardens and landscaping create a dramatic backdrop for the site’s classically inspired architecture, with groves of olive trees, flowering shrubs, cooking herbs, and other plant species known from the ancient Mediterranean.

In addition to the historically accurate species found in the four gardens and in areas closest to the J. Paul Getty Museum building, the landscape design also features a mix of Mediterranean and native California



varieties, local plants of the Santa Monica mountains, and plants from other parts of the world that grow in climates similar to that of Southern California.

Gardens

Gardens were important features of ancient life, with most houses containing both formal gardens used for pleasure as well as household gardens filled with practical plantings.

Herb Garden: This informal garden features plants that were staples in gardens of ancient Roman homes and grown for their religious significance, use in cooking, and for medicine. Spices and herbs such as thyme, oregano, and basil are arranged in long beds along the north end of this garden, which is framed by an olive grove at its western edge. Fruit trees bearing plums, apricots, figs, and peaches are arranged at the south end, along with a range of plants from catmint and spearmint to sage and chamomile, and a peeled cyprus grape arbor.



East Garden: The highlight of this garden is a replica of an ancient niche water feature from the House of the Large Fountain in Pompeii, decorated with shells and theater masks.

Surrounding the garden are tall white plaster walls, which have a clipped boxwood hedge and a border of feverfew lining their base. Around the garden are eight sycamore trees and eight laurel trees, large terracotta pots with strawberry trees and myrtle, as well as plantings of violets and cyclamen that accent holly bushes and acanthus.

Inner Peristyle: This is the smaller of the two formal gardens. The space is surrounded by 36 columns and separated down the middle by a long, narrow pool. Bronze statues stand at its edges and ivy topiaries provide a formal symmetry to the space. At each of its four corners, a white fountain overflows into a pool outlined with gravel and creeping jenny. This garden is predominantly green, filled with plants such as acanthus, myrtle, butcher's broom, and ivy, highlighted with colorful spots of foxglove, mullein, Canterbury bells, lily, hellebore, and other flowers.

Outer Peristyle: This is the Villa's largest and grandest garden. In classical Rome, this formal space would have offered a peaceful spot for conversation and contemplation. The Outer Peristyle is dominated by a large pool running down the center. Bronze sculpture and replicas of statues discovered in the remains of the first-century Villa dei Papiri have been placed in their ancient findspots. Trimmed ivy topiaries frame the edges of the pool, which is crowned at its north end with two pomegranate trees and enclosed by 24 Grecian laurels on either side, mirroring the structural columns of the building. Benches are available—located in arbors draped in grape vines, and nestled in pockets surrounded by hand-crafted wood trellises.

Clusters of rose gardens are filled with ancient gallica, and damask, while much of the ground is covered with a layer of sweet violet. Flowering perennials such as chamomile, daisy, and rosemary are planted in abundance for variety and color, along with tulips, iris, Madonna lily, cyclamen, sweet allysum, yarrow, morning glory and narcissus.

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