



Garden Glories

ANTIQUE URNS, STATUARY, AND PLANTERS STILL COMMAND A PRESENCE OUTDOORS, CENTURIES AFTER FIRST MAKING A SPLASH IN EUROPEAN GARDENS. TEXT JENNIFER BOLES

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Shapely urns, statues of gods and goddesses, leonine wall ornaments spouting water into fountains, and French box-style planters—these are just some of the classic outdoor embellishments with which we decorate our gardens today. But what many may not realize is that each of these forms dates back centuries. While the spacious, formal gardens they were once made for may have lost ground to more informal landscaping, the charm and delightful nature of these ornaments and statues have ensured their place in gardens over the centuries.

The modern notion of the formal garden can be traced back to Renaissance-era Italy, where the rich and powerful, including the Medici family, displayed their wealth and prestige by commissioning and residing in grand villas, which in turn spawned the desire for gardens designed to be equally as magnificent. Designed in an orderly, rational manner, the Italian Renaissance garden was notable for being divided into segments, with sections typically delineated by walls, terraces, and balustrades or clipped hedges and trees. This series of outdoor rooms not only featured trees, shrubbery, and flowers, but they also served as opportunities for decorative showiness. Water features, sometimes in the form of serpent-like waterspouts or marble fountains carved to imitate water nymphs, were notable additions to these formal gardens, as were large-scale ornaments and sculpture.

Because a reverence for ancient Greece and Rome was at the heart of the Renaissance, the classical style permeated many of these gardens,



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with reproductions of ancient Greek urns and obelisks and even authentic ancient artifacts incorporated into their layouts. Statues of mythological creatures and gods, such as Apollo and Neptune, proved popular, as did allegorical figures. In fact, sculpture was such an important part of the Italian Renaissance garden that many of that era's greatest artists, including Gian Lorenzo Bernini, created marble statuary for their patrons' vaulted gardens.

French tastemakers were subsequently inspired by Italian gardens' formality, and they adopted many of the Italian design concepts. But in typical French fashion, they made their gardens even grander and more magnificent, in keeping with the chateaux they were designed for. Nowhere was this more evident than at Versailles, Louis XIV's awe-inspiring palace, where its gardens were designed by the great landscape architect André Le Nôtre in the mid- to late-seventeenth century. With the Baroque style by then in full swing, many of Versailles' sculptures and fountains were highly dramatic, like that of a chariot holding Apollo emerging from the water alongside his rearing horses. But Versailles also contributed a unique style to the annals of design history, and it is one that is still being reproduced today: the Caisse de Versailles, a wooden, box-style planter, designed for the rare citrus trees that dotted the palace's landscape. When cold weather set in, these planters allowed for easy transport of the citrus trees to the warmer environment inside Versailles' orangeries, buildings that were engineered to protect these delicate specimens.

Since then, garden fashions have trended toward informality, most notably in the form of the eighteenth-century English landscape garden, which still influences gardeners today. But what hasn't changed is garden owners' fondness for these decorative relics from the past. No matter whether a garden is big or small, formal or casual, a Grecian urn or even the figure of Neptune may likely be found.



need to KNOW

- Antique garden statuary can be found in a variety of materials, including marble, limestone, bronze, lead, and terra-cotta. Equally diverse is the subject matter, which ranges from Greek and Roman gods to dogs and gnomes. Architectural accents, such as plinths, obelisks, and finials, remain popular and lend themselves to a variety of garden styles.
- Types of antique planters, urns, and jars include the Vase d'Anduze, a colorful, glazed terra-cotta planter first produced in France in the sixteenth century, while Greek Peloponnese olive jars, some dating back to the nineteenth century, have been repurposed for use in the garden.
- "Naturally, classical pieces are always popular, especially when they can cohesively exist alongside modern architecture," says Susan Hoffer, who, with her husband, Wolfgang, owns Authentic Provence, an antiques garden and lifestyle emporium located in Palm Beach, Florida. "At the moment, contemporary lead is in high demand for garden ornaments, as are pieces with a modern design that have a traditional or historical flair."
- Like the wide range of antique forms on the market, prices can vary greatly, depending on the type of piece and condition. According to Hoffer, "How an item is made is most likely going to determine the price point. For example, a sculpture made on a machine will have a much lower value in contrast to a sculpture made by hand, carved out of a block of natural stone."

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