How does your garden grow?

After an arid 2008, and subsequent water rationing, the island’s prayers appear to have been answered. The rains have fallen, making this the perfect time to begin working on your garden! This is your complete guide on choosing the right plants to put your green fingers to work.

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Having a garden in Cyprus is quite different to having a garden anywhere else in the world. Cyprus enjoys year-round sun, very high summer temperatures and suffers long periods of drought, with only scattered rainfall from November to March. But the Troodos area gets its share of snowfall in winter, and frost can be experienced at elevations of 300m and above. Depending on where you live, the soil can be red clay or sandy. So, for someone wishing to test out their gardening skills, there are a few basic things to know about what to plant and where, which plants thrive in your particular area, what to look out for and what to steer clear from.
Hedges

If you live in the city, hedges are a good way to replace the ugly chicken-wire fences that separate properties, and also act as windbreakers, inhibit noise intrusion, and are generally quite pretty to look at. There are a number of options available, depending on the purpose which you wish your hedge to serve.

If you are looking to build an impenetrable barrier to keep grazing animals (or even the odd intruder) off your property, a good hedge would be the Opuntia (prickly pear), which also happens to be quite cheap. This cactus grows about 1 metre per year.

If you are looking for something equally impenetrable, yet not quite as dangerous-looking, pomegranates also make good barriers, although they are much slower to grow. However, they do provide an abundance of bright, red, waxy flowers, and beneficial fruit to boot.

If height is not so important, then other popular options for hedges are Pistacia lentiscus (mastic) or Bamboo—which is also easy to maintain and cheap to acquire.

Other hedges that adapt well to a town environment:

- Acacia
- Berberis Darwinii (Barberry)
- Cotinis armata
- Cupressus macrocarpa (Monterey Cypress)
- Escallonia
- Euclea japonica (Spindle tree)
- Hebe speciosa
- Lentana camara (Spanish flag)
- Myoporum lasianthus (Mauvehole tree)
- Myrtus communis (Common myrtle)
- Nerium oleander
- Osmanthus delavayi (Chinese holly)
- Pittosporum tobira
- Pyracantha (Firethorn)
- Rosa rugosa (Japanese rose)
- Simmondsia chinensis (Jojoba)
- Taxus baccata (Yew)
- Viburnum tinus

Extra tips:

- Most of these hedges are also salt-resistant, thus will be suitable for coastal homes.
- If you select a small shrub such as Hebe or Berberis, double-plant about 30cm apart.
- For larger forest trees, like Cupressus or Crataegus, allow a metre between the plants.
- Remember to plant up to the soil mark on the stem.
- It's a good idea to flood the trench with water before planting and to soak the plants by standing them overnight in a water container.
- Once your hedge is established, make sure to remove all dead growth, spray against insect infestation, check for fungal infections, and clear all weeds and impediments from the base.

General gardening tips:

- Bear in mind that plants in Cyprus grow ten times quicker than they do elsewhere in the world. Special care and attention is needed to ensure your garden does not end up looking like a jungle.
- If you live in a high altitude, do try and go for more hardy, indigenous trees and shrubs. Delicate plants simply won't survive the cold and occasional frost.
- Make sure you are aware of the depth of your soil, and avoid planting shrubs or trees with deep root systems on shallow soil.
- When it comes to designing your garden, make sure to create a bold focal point, one that is furthest away from the onlooker, thus allowing the eye to roam all across the rest of the garden, and entice onlookers to walk in towards the visible object.
- Despite the recent rains, the water problem is still a serious one in Cyprus. Do try to avoid lawns at all costs. They require ridiculous amounts of water, and, with the frequent water cuts, often end up yellow and dried up, and not at all pretty.
Flowering Plants

If you want a colourful garden, there are a number of options for flowering plants that are suitable. Campanulas are especially colourful at the start of spring, and add an abundance of vibrant reds, yellows and oranges, while geraniums are the easiest to grow in Cyprus soil. For year-round colour, the solana bush and the oleander bloom beautifully, and for an early start to the blooming process, irises are best for centrally-located gardens. Indeed, their colours are quite spectacular, particularly with their exotic petal formation, ranging from white, brown, bronze, yellow, pale blue to purple and even ebony.

For those of you whose homes are on elevated ground these perennial plant combinations would be your best bet:
- Bergenia
- Baptista
- Anthemis
- Aquilegia
- Lupin
- Foxglove
- Delphinium
- Acanthus
- Canus

Architectural Plants

There are a number of bold, eye-catching architectural plants to look for in Cyprus. Succulents, especially, are water-retaining plants adapted to arid climate or soil conditions, making them ideal for Cyprus. They are very attractive, produce a good floral display and have relatively good ground cover.

Other suitable architectural plants include:
- Phormium tenax, also known as the New Zealand flax, which is a clump-forming perennial that grows like a semi-evergreen. It has upright, long dark green leaves with red tube-shaped colour.
- The Phormium "Sundowner," which is a slightly smaller version of the Phormium tenax, boasts beautiful, broad bronze green leaves with dark rose-pink fringes.
- The Agave Americana ‘Marginata’ can grow up to 25 feet in 10 years or so. It has rigid, fleshy sharp spines and jagged borders, but its yellow-fringed foliage is very arresting.
- The Yucca gloriosa boasts narrow, lance-shaped green leaves.
- The Avera plant, of pharmaceutical fame, also boasts a very spectacular flower spike, which will last in water or dried for weeks.
- If you can get hold of one, the Puya chilensis provides beautiful waxy, jade coloured flowers.

Extra tips

- Beugainvilleas are a typically popular, colourful plant in Cyprus gardens, but bear in mind that they grow like wildfire, need lots of irrigation, and, without proper maintenance, may eventually turn your garden into a jungle.
- Do try and stay away from the bark of your oleander bushes, as the sap is poisonous.
- Geraniums are the easiest plant to reproduce—simply snap a piece off, plant it in the ground, and presto! You have another 5 plants!

Extra tips

- Succulents are the most hardy of all plant species, and once in place will take some shifting, so make sure to give them plenty of room.
- Yucca palms can also be quite dangerous if one happens to walk into them by mistake, thanks to their sharp edges, so make sure you allow yourself room to walk around them.
Nurseries and Gardening equipment

• Idalion Garden Services. Landscaping, maintenance and expert advice. Located in Nicosia, but all areas considered. Tel: 99354306.

• Magistrato Nursery, Landscaping and Maintenance Company. Located in Limassol, but take work all across the island. Tel: 25812988.

• Louka’s Landscapes. Qualified UK Landscape Designer specialising in Mediterranean garden projects. Most projects in Paphos, but also operates islandwide. Tel: 99102470.

• Solomou Nurseries Ltd, Solomou Garden Centre. Offers a large selection of vegetables, ornamentals, seeds, substrate, fertilisers and trays, as well as experienced landscape architects and landscapers. Located on the Neoclas Limassol highway, on the exit of Nicosia village. Tel: 22581439.

• Cyttaro Garden Centre. Deals with landscape consultancy, design, construction and maintenance. Yeri, Nicosia. Tel: 22483600

• Ydroks Ltd. Seedling nursery which employs high-tech methods to ensure plants are free from diseases. Kolavasos, Larnaca. Tel: 24339129.

• The Green Garden: Garden centre and nursery selling a wide range of indoor and outdoor plants and shrubs, gardening tools and accessories, as well as florist services. Asonatos, Limassol. Tel: 22952777.

• P&E Ltd. Nursery and Flowers. Supply trees, shrubs, cut flowers, agrochemicals and pesticides. Polemidia highway, Limassol. Tel: 25999999

• Green Forest Nursery. Garden centre and landscaping services. Off Paphos-Limassol highway, on the way to Anarita. Tel: 26422479

• Anitiva Garden Centre. Stocks a selection of trees, plants, pots, flowers, water features and irrigation systems. Agarinaros Street, Paphos. Tel: 26938000

Fruits, herbs and vegetables

Cyprus has an abundance of fruit trees that flourish well in our hot, dry climate. Vegetables, however, are slightly trickier.

For a garden of fruit trees that are also pleasant to look at, go for:
Any citrus variety, Olive trees, Apple trees, Peach trees, Juglans regia (English walnut), Morus alba (white mulberry) Eriobotrya japonica (Loquat)

For the shady area in your garden, these fruit plants will flourish quite well:
Alpine strawberries, Autumn raspberries, Plums, Pear (Conference, Emile D’Heyst, etc), Morello cherry, Gooseberries, Redcurrants, Rhubarb, Elderflower, Quince

Vegetables are much harder to maintain, especially during the summer, and need an area of the garden with some shade. Veggies that will flourish with a bit of shade include:
Leeks, Kale
Calvo Nero, Radicchio
Chard, Spinach Beet
Cress, Radish
Sage, Rosemary
Bay, Lettuce (winter varieties)
Mustard Greens, Asparagus

Herbs and aromatics grow well anywhere on the island, but especially on the coastline. Some examples of aromatics you could try include:
Lavender, Rosemary
Oregano, Thyme

Extra tips

• The shady space in your garden could also be put to good use in the winter as a Christmas corner, growing yew, holly and ivy.
• Vegetables like runner beans could be sown and grown in the sun, and then re-planted in the shady area when they are big enough to cling to a frame.
• Citrus trees are the most popular in Cyprus and for good reason - who wouldn’t want their garden smelling of delicious lemon blossoms?
• If you are looking for a sweet-smelling garden, any kind of herbs and aromatics would also do the trick.
• Green vegetables are best grown during the winter months.