

## History of the Pergola

### Ancient Rome

80 BC – Pergolas are first recognized in a mosaic, discovered in one of Rome's provinces—Palestrina. Depicted on the banks near the Canopic canal of the river Nile, the mosaic demonstrates a Graeco-Roman lifestyle; couples are pictured sitting beneath a rose-coated, arched pergola.

79 AD – Pliny the Younger describes a portion of his garden as having a . . . *“curved dining couch of white marble, shaded by a vine trained over four slender pillars of Carystian marble.”* Archaeological evidence from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius reveals pergolas with marble pillars at Pompeii and surrounding locations throughout the Roman provinces.

C.300 AD – A fresco painting displays Jonah resting under a simply constructed pergola. The semicircular structure is connected by three knotted rose garlands. A similar description of a pergola during this period is given by Gregory of Nysa as he expresses (about an estate he visits) a pergola-like structure: *“Who could find the words worthy to describe the path under the climbing vines, and the sweet shade of their cluster, and that novel wall structure where roses with their shoots, and vines with their trailers, twist themselves together . . .”*

C.400 AD – Pergolas continued to be popular during the fifth century Roman Empire. A distinct Roman citizen, Hesychius, designed a magnificent garden where pergolas occupied one-third of the outdoor space. One pergola protected both his fountain pool and dining area from the sun. A small paved pathway linked another pergola, which was supported by four pairs of marble columns.

### Medieval Pergolas

1165 – The Christ Church Priory in Canterbury exhibited an interior pergola walkway that separated each half of the two-part garden. The perimeter of the garden is sustained by a free-standing stone and tile pergola.

1260 – Albertus Magnus, a well-traveled abbot, mentioned in his writings the necessity for shady walks within a garden. He claimed *“trees should be planted and vines trained round the edge of the lawn to give a delightful cooling shade, leaving lightness and airiness in the centre.”*

1395 – Flemish writer, Froissart, visited Eltham Palace and recounted walking around the garden, *“where it was very pleasant and shady, for those alleys were then covered in vines.”*

c.1500 – Pergolas were designed after such woods as ash, alder, hazel and willow were coppiced. Forked poles were used as place-holders for wooden pole inserts, and twigs were implemented as tying tools for the beams' cross sections.

### The Renaissance

C.1550-1600 – The terms 'bower' and 'arbor' were used to describe pergola-like structures. Bowers were considered to be covered walkways or tunnels, while arbors were smaller structures with detailed wooden frameworks that covered sitting places. Both structures, for the first time, were completely covered with greenery.

1573 – Observed by French architect, Etienne du Perac and adopted by another French architect, Androuet du Cerceau, the elaborate style of separating gardens with pavilions became customary throughout Renaissance France.

1587 – Engravings from the Dutch artist, Hans Vredeman de Vries, exhibited in his piece *Hortorum viridiarumque* illustrate a myriad of tunnels, bowers and arbors. These structures serve as entry points and shaded walkways, while exemplifying traditional Renaissance gardens.

1625 – Francis Bacon referred to traditional Dutch architecture in his essay ‘Of Gardens.’ He states one might “*Plant a Covert Alley, upon Carpenters Worke, about Twelve Foot in Height, by which you may goe in Shade, into the Garden.*”

C.1645 – British records reveal examples of larger, pergola-like structures, as designed by Salomon de Caus at the garden at Wilton. Although these grandiose constructions were rare, the British writer and gardener, John Evelyn, notes these in his work *Elysium Britannicum*. They were made of cleft oak, which better protected the surface from rot. The 12 feet high frame was supplemented by a narrow width in order to aesthetically make the covered walk seem spacious.

1689 – The Privy Garden at Hampton Court, occupied by William and Mary, exhibited a new style of the bower. The structure was 100 yards long, 12 feet wide and 18 feet high, as it was created from oak supports and fir rails; these posts were positioned atop two sill beams. At the center of the bower, an arched opening manifested symmetry within the garden.

1706 – George London and Henry Wise, illustrious English gardeners, referred to arched tunnels in their book *The Re-tir'd Gard'ner*. The structures were blanketed with lime trees and supported by a connection of four, equally proportioned columns.

1709 – John James’ *The Theory and Practice of Gardening* (a translation of Dézallier d’Argenville’s work *La théorie et la pratique du jardinage*) describes the consistent designs of naturally and artificially constructed arbors throughout the mid and late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Natural arbors were assembled from interwoven tree branches and durable latticework, hoops and poles; female elms were used to plant the arbors. Artificial arbors consisted of lattice-work, which were supported by cross-rails and arches made of iron.

1775 – M.Roubo noted in his book, *L’art du treillageur ou menuiserie des jardins*, the changes of the artificial bower. They became more elaborate structures because of their wooden, tied-together latticework and iron frame. For the structural features, oak was the favored timber, and these intricacies were held together with metal wire and nails. The artificial garden structures were now viewed as architectural achievements, rather than an arrangement to support plants.

## The Victorian Pergolas

1834-1842 – George Fleming, the gardener at Trentham, used arched, iron hoops to cover an extended walkway on the east side of the Italian gardens. The simple design was coated with roses, honeysuckles and clematis, while the hoops are presently standing.

1889 – Changes in the design and purpose of the pergola are noted by garden writer, William Robinson, in his book *English Flower Garden*. Drawn from the uses of the Italian pergola, he advises: “*though our summer is short, there are a good three months when a bowery shaded walk would be most enjoyable. . .*” Structurally, Robinson describes pergolas with upward stone, masonry or oak pillars that supported horizontally positioned oak stems along the top. A depiction of this style is seen at the Capuchin monastery in Amalfi, Italy.

C.1892 – Acclaimed gardener, Gertrude Jekyll, completed a pergola that was used as a shaded walk along the perimeter of her own garden at Munstead Wood.

1884 – The Arts and Crafts movement adopted the Italian pergola as an essential component that linked house and garden. The movement’s architects agreed a pergola built with posts, crossbeams and covered with greenery was necessary for unity among the house and the garden.

1893 – The earliest classical style pergola was introduced at Woodside, Buckinghamshire by architect Edwin Lutyens. Positioned in pairs around a pond, Doric columns were used to support the pergola.

1903 – Nymans in Sussex displays a long pergola made with stones and timber beams.

## Pergolas of Today and Tomorrow

Through advanced technology, modern pergolas have progressed from the ancient Roman period, but they still retain the same purposes – shade along with architectural artistry. Pergolas continue to serve as entry points into a garden, coverings for a pool or pavilion, and aesthetic walkways within a garden or outdoor space.

The pergola’s materials have advanced also. Components such as fiberglass columns, red cedar posts, aluminum columns, steel reinforced PVC beams and rafters contribute to the pergola’s durability. Not only are pergolas freestanding structures, they can currently be used as an attachment to an existing structure, as seen with wall pergolas.

Some advantages of modern pergolas include: ease of assembly, an internal irrigation drip system that distributes water to overhead plants, and also an internal lighting system for beauty at night.