

PLANTS



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Planter boxes are very strange things. I'm not quite sure what they really are. Are they a collection of semi-portable plants? Spots of color in an otherwise boring space? Are they little tiny attempts to control nature? Yes, they are, and we love them. Every culture has them in one way or another. Tires filled with dirt on the front lawn and planted with Daisies is the same as a Count telling his staff to brighten things up a bit on the South terrace.

Menaggio, Italy



Finally we enter the realm of Topiary, Penjing and Bonsai. The clipping of plants, to conform to our desires and fantasies. There are those who think of this activity as a form of “Botanical torture.” But they seem outnumbered by the enormous group of people who engage in this obsessive clipping. There are obviously a lot of people who like their Nature very, very ordered and organized.

*Les Jardins du Manoir d'Eyrignac,
Salignac, France*



Cypress, arborvitae (*Thuja* spp.) and Yew (*taxus*) are commonly used in this obsessive-compulsive desire to get nature to shape up. It certainly keeps a lot of hedge trimmers employed as the tiresome plants just keep on growing. (A lot more on this later.)

*Les Jardins du Manoir d'Eyrignac,
Salignac, France*



Like many of the great palaces of Europe, the gardens are a lot more impressive than the grand houses. Julien de Cervel owned the chateau and gardens in the 1860's and began importing thousands of Boxwood (trees, *Buxus sempervirens*). He started having them trimmed in extraordinary shapes. Originally, these gardens were designed by a pupil of Andre Le Notre, then neglected for many years. The current restoration was accomplished by Kleber Rossillon and opened to the public in 1996.

Les jardins de Marqueyssac
Vézac, Dordogne, France



This chateau garden is owned by an American real estate magnate and he maintains a small year round staff to take care of guests. He has more than one gardener and they clip the topiary, just to let nature know who really runs the show.

*Undisclosed location,
Near the Loire Valley,
France*



This is in a town that was a French colony. Then came the British and they bring Britain with them wherever they go, and their games come with them. Lawn bowling requires a perfectly manicured surface. (Compare this surface to those used in Bocci or Pétanque, let alone Irish “Road bowling.”) These lawns look as though they have been either combed (they have been) or manufactured and today it is hard to tell the difference. What really matters is you have to wear your whites, speak softly and tread carefully on your perfect nature.

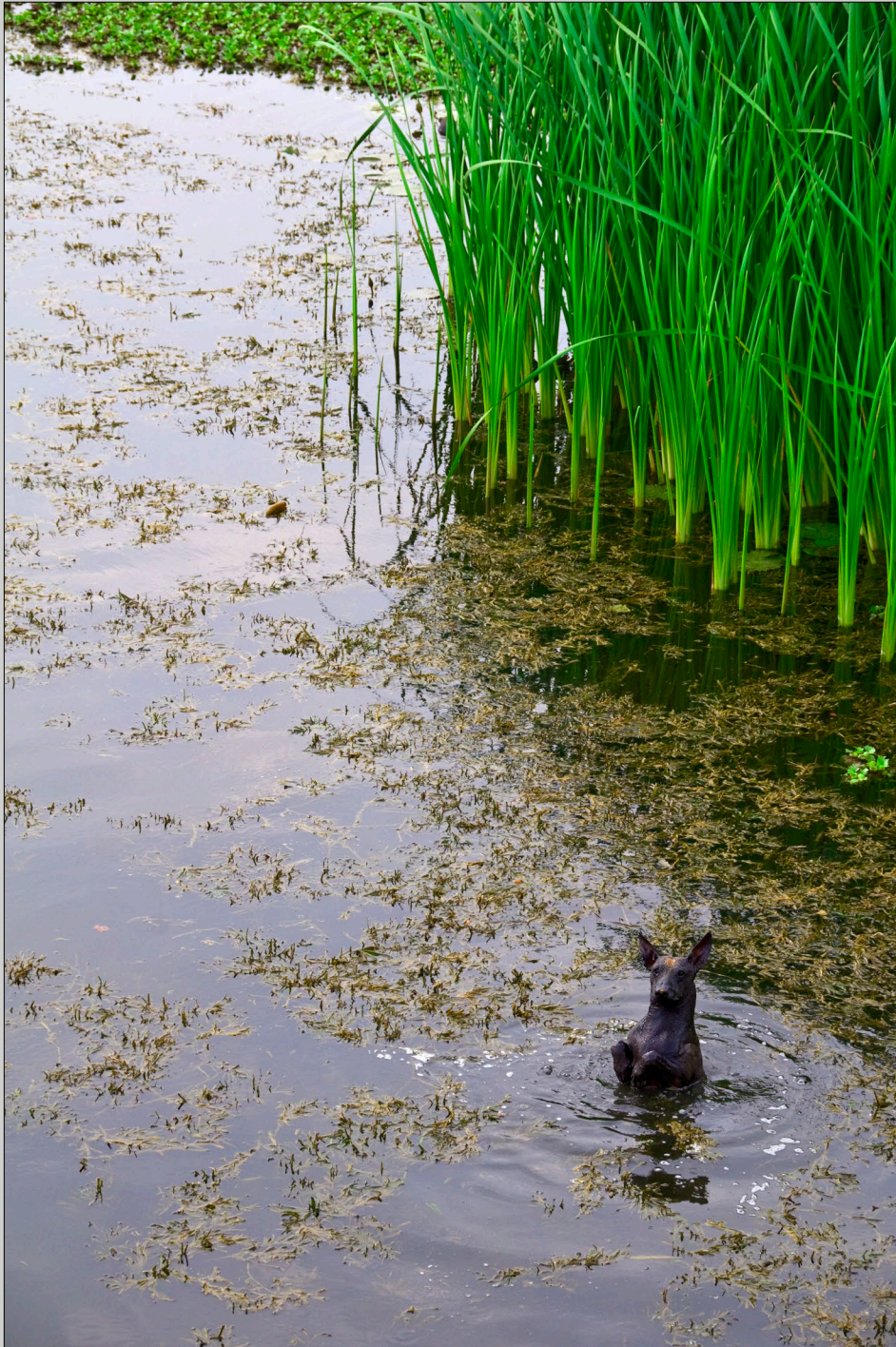
It is a bit surprising that these are the same people who play rugby and tear opponents’ ears off.

*Akaroa, Banks Peninsula
South Island, New Zealand*



Once you buy a diamond, the cost is over. When you buy or inherit a Villa you learn how to hemorrhage money. The word maintenance comes from the French verb 'maintenir,' and stems from 'la main' the hand. To hold in the hand is to care for something, to maintain it, and it turns out to be the most expensive of all. But of course, the old place needs to look just as neat as it always did. After all what would people think?

*Villa Lante,
Bagnaia, Italy*



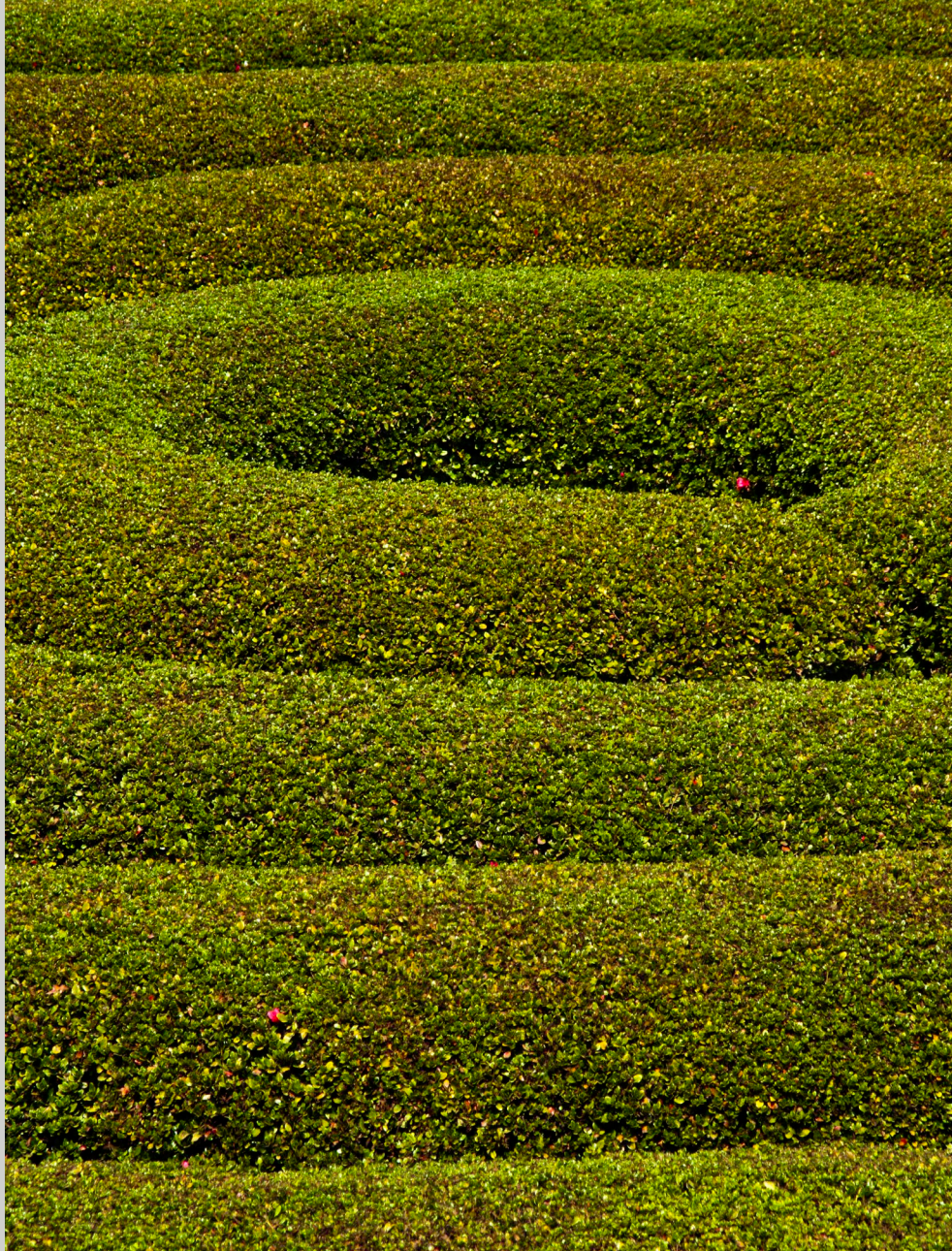
Given all the effort put into taking care of plants and water in a garden we can rightfully ask what place is there for animals in the idea of garden? The answer is not much at all. There were provisions earlier on, but now there is almost none. Animals are seen as disruptive and are usually discouraged. Even domestic animals are seen as a pain in the neck.

*Chan Chan,
Moche Valley, Peru*



If animals are really decorative and fit in with our idea of flamboyance and the display that goes along with it, then, we are willing to include them in the garden. (The racket peacocks make could wake the dead, but then again, the tourists are not in the garden at dawn when the peacocks let loose.)

*Isola Bella, Lake Como,
Italy*



Many castles are surrounded by a moat. Yes, you always put the most valuable things behind as many barriers as possible. It is our way of safeguarding something. Caring for it. When the artist Robert Irwin takes us down the long ramp in the garden he designed for the Getty Center we arrive at a kind of moat at whose center are elaborately clipped and carefully maintained swirling plants. I don't think he was just showing off his horticultural wizardry. The message: the thing to be protected and cared for now is what is left of nature and it is the most important job we have. It might be the only one.

The Getty Center
Los Angeles, California



Taking clues from nature might be one of the oldest creative urges. This temporary 'Land Art' installation by an artist is taking its clues from the hill beyond as a way to relieve the enormous flatness of the adjacent valley that supplies more than half of the vegetables grown in America.

*Undisclosed location,
Central Valley, California*



Tapis Vert means *green carpet* or an expanse of lawn, but carpets have patterns in them too and if you extrude those patterns you begin to have a hedge complex and from there it is an easy step into the idea of a maze. Claude Mollet and his family in the 16th century are generally given credit for the introduction of boxwood to garden design and the use of the 'Parterre' (fr. 'on the ground')

*Villa Lante,
Bagnaia, Italy*