



**PGG Traineeship Study Tour to the Algarve, Portugal  
March 2018**

**Award Report for The Merlin Trust  
by Sharon Horder (Merlin 731)**

## **Contents**

Introduction .....	3
Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal (MGAP) .....	3
The Algarve Region .....	3
Quinta da Figueirinha and the Barrocal Botanic Garden.....	3
Our Study Tour.....	5
Summary .....	35
References .....	36
Acknowledgements.....	36
Finance Report.....	37

## Introduction

I am a Trainee Horticulturalist, currently in my second year of the 3-year Professional Gardeners Guild Traineeship. As part of this training scheme, myself and five other PGG trainees travelled to Portugal in March 2018 for a study tour. The Merlin Trust awarded me funding for a five-day visit to the Algarve region as part of this study tour. This visit to the Algarve was made possible by the Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal, who hosted our trip to learn about Mediterranean flora, gardening and geology.

## Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal (MGAP)

The Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal is a not-for-profit organisation which acts as a forum for bringing together people with an interest in Mediterranean plants, gardens and horticulture. They are part of a wider umbrella group, Mediterranean Gardening International (MGi) which has branch societies in many countries around the world. In Portugal, MGAP is run by volunteer members who aim to promote and share their knowledge of and interest in Mediterranean plants and gardening. They do this through education, research, arranging events and visits, and exchanging experiences. Environmentally-friendly gardening is a major objective of the work and education that they do.

## The Algarve Region

For the duration of our visit, we were based at Quinta da Figueirinha, a 36-hectare bio-agricultural farm just outside the town of Silves, which is in the Barrocal area of the Algarve in the south-west of the Iberian Peninsula. Quinta da Figueirinha is an agritourism business as well as a site of agricultural and horticultural activities.

The Algarve region has three ecological areas: Serra (mountains), Littoral (coast) and Barrocal (central section). The Serra is a range of hills rather than high peaks which form the northern border of the Algarve region. The hills are of volcanic origin, so the soil here is schist/slate and an acid pH. The Littoral is a narrow strip along the Algarve coast where the major urban centres are found and which has the beaches that attract visitors from around the world. The habitat here consists of dense shrubs and some woodland trees which grow in the sandy soil and are pruned by the coastal winds.

In between these two regions, the Barrocal area is known as 'the orchard of the Algarve' as it is a recognised biodiversity hotspot. This area of lush agricultural land is home to the flora of 1001 taxa, 461 genus and 101 botanical families, and is where the characteristic citrus, fig and almond and olive trees of the region can be found. The semi-arid zone runs from Cape St Vincent to Castro Marim, and within it an extensive range of Mesozoic carbonated soils are found.

## Quinta da Figueirinha and the Barrocal Botanic Garden

Our base at Quinta da Figueirinha was a typical Barrocal site, covered by citrus plantations and natural vegetation, with views out to the mountains. However, we were very lucky to be based here, as the owners have also planted various botanic gardens on the site. The owners have had a particular interest in conserving the native plants, and in investigating drought-

resistant/drought-tolerant plants, erosion control, and fire-resistant plants to help with the prevention of Portugal's forest fires. On this site, they have created a drought-resistant plantation, an exotic fruit tree garden, citrus plantations, and a Cypress plantation (as Cypresses are amongst the most fire-resistant trees). In addition, together with MGAP, they have recently created the Barrocal Botanic Garden.

This Barrocal Botanic Garden has been created on the highest point of the Quinta da Figueirinha on a site covering approximately 1000 square metres. This is an area with a dense variety of native plants, and MGAP are enhancing it by planting other species that are typical of the Barrocal region but not currently represented at the garden. Planting began in February 2017 with the aim of demonstrating the potential of native Barrocal plants to visitors, with the garden acting as a beautiful, diverse educational resource throughout the year. More planting and paths have been added over the last year or so, and the garden is now open to visitors.



*An Area of the Barrocal Botanic Garden*

## Our Study Tour

Our group of six trainees travelled to the Algarve on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April from Sintra, Lisbon where we had been based for the previous week. We travelled by train and met our host, Teresa Chuva at Faro Station, then drove to our accommodation at Quinta da Figueirinha. Teresa is a gardener and member of MGAP, and she had designed our programme of activities for us. On arrival at the Quinta, we were introduced to the owner, Dr Gerhard Zabel, who has run it since 1988. Unfortunately, it was dark by the time we arrived at the site, so we didn't have the opportunity to see the Quinta that day, instead we settled into our accommodation and waited until the next morning to explore.

### Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April

We had a quiet morning settling into our accommodation and visiting the local town, Silves. This gave us an opportunity to see the flora of the local countryside and of Quinta da Figueirinha. Plants typical of this part of the Mediterranean were abundant, such as Acacia, *Olea europaea* (Olive), *Prunus dulcis* (Almond) and Citrus trees, and could be seen in most people's gardens. Other plants commonly seen within gardens, including the Quinta, included Palms, Agaves, Cacti, Callistemon, *Oosteospermum* and *Lavandula*. The roadsides had *Anchusa azurea* (Large Blue Alkanet), *Papaver rhoeas* (Common Poppy), *Asphodelus fistulosus* (Asphodel) and *Fumaria capreolata* (White Ramping Fumitory) growing freely and all in flower.



*Asphodelus fistulosus* (Hollow-Stemmed Asphodel)

In the afternoon, Theresa took us on a walk up to the area of land on the Quinta that has been turned into the Barrocal Botanic Garden. She pointed out both the native species that flourish on the land, and the new plants that have been added by MGAP. Native plants included trees

such as *Quercus ilex rotundifolia* (Mediterranean Oak), shrubs such as *Daphne gnidium* and succulents like *Sedum sediforme*.



*Sedum sediforme*

There was also a lot of *Pistacia lentiscus* (Lentisk), a plant that we would see a lot of over the week as it thrives in the Barrocal conditions and grows freely over the hillsides and in gardens. This shrub is dense and evergreen, and is a useful shrub for Mediterranean gardeners. The leaves are an attractive green and the male plants have red-brown Mulberry-like berries. It looks nice as a round shrub and also works well as a hedge, either low or high. Theresa told us that it responds well to pruning and is hard to kill, so is a useful addition to many gardens!



*Pistacia lentiscus* (Lentisk) Bush



*Pistacia lentiscus* (Lentisk) Flowers

Plants that had been added to the Botanic Garden by MGAP included various *Cistus* species, *Lavandula stoechas* subsp. *luisieri* and *Scilla peruviana* 'Alba.'



*Lavandula stoechas* subsp. *luisieri*

Theresa told us that the MGAP members had started by clearing the area of dead branches and plants before then introducing more plants and building a gravel path. There is no lawn at the Botanic Garden and there are no plans for any irrigation other than for new plants in the first year after planting. Gerhard and MGAP want to keep the site as a physical place where visitors will see, hear, touch and sense the native wildlife without any technological interventions. There is a total of 2.3 hectares of land at the Quinta that is available for MGAP to use, and so they are concentrating on the Botanic Garden initially but then hope to build an area for schools, an area of fire-resistant trees and an area of plants not native to the Barrocal but adapted to the conditions of the area. They have already built a new access track to the garden from the main road, and plans are underway for a parking area next. Members and volunteers will contribute to these plans over the coming years to get the site up and running properly for visitors. Both Gerhard and MGAP are really keen to use this place to educate both the Portuguese and the expatriate community about the benefits of planting native species and the need to conserve water, wildlife and the local environment.

After our tour of the Botanic Garden with Theresa, we were joined by Rosie Peddle, a founding member of MGAP, and her husband Rob, the current Treasurer, who had come to welcome us to the Algarve. With their guidance, we helped out with a couple of jobs at the Botanic Garden. The first was to continue laying a gravel path that had been started by MGAP volunteers. Using wheelbarrows and shovels, we spread a pile of gravel from the end of the existing path to continue it further on, and then raked it over to create an even surface. After this, using shovels and rakes again, we distributed a pile of chippings over some of the beds in the garden as a mulch. The chippings were pruning material from when MGAP had cleared the area which had then been shredded. Rosie instructed us as to where she wanted us to mulch, which was on the beds with the most depleted soil, where the plants would most benefit from the mulch.

The day was a great opportunity to see all of the work that the MGAP have been doing at Quinta da Figueirinha, and also to learn about the plants that are native to this part of Portugal and what thrives in this climate and soil. Some of the plants were familiar to me but others were plants I was seeing for the first time, so it was a great learning experience for me. The plants highlight of the day for me was seeing the Bee Orchids that grow freely in these conditions and that are flowering at the moment. We saw plenty of *Ophrys speculum* (Mirror Orchids) and *Ophrys lutea* (Yellow Bee Orchids) both in the Botanic Garden and on the Quinta land around our accommodation. It was the first time I had seen either of these plants, and the delicate shapes, colours and markings of their flowers is fascinating. They both have adapted to attract their pollinators through a deceptive mimicry of the insect's appearance. Some parts of the flower have hairs to imitate the hairy bodies of insects, some parts are shiny, imitating the wings, and the *Ophrys speculum* flower even has pseudo-eyes making it look even more insect-like.



*Ophrys speculum* (Mirror Orchid)



*Ophrys lutea* (Yellow Bee Orchid)

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April

On Monday, Theresa had arranged for us to spend the day with Marilyn Medina Ribeiro, an English Landscape Architect who runs her own business, WaterWise Gardens, designing and creating gardens in the Algarve. Her primary focus is on creating gardens that are responsible about water use, with drought-resistant or drought-tolerant, native plantings that are sustainable and sensitive to the local environment. She took us to see two of the gardens that she has designed and consulted.

The first garden was in the Littoral region of the Algarve, on a private residential estate next to a golf course near the beach. Two years ago, her client had asked her to redesign his garden to be drought-tolerant, getting rid of a large lawn and using more native and dry plantings. Now in the first full-year after planting, there is a small front garden and a large back garden set around a pool and with several different areas. In the front garden, there is no lawn but two large beds either side of the driveway with a gravel mulch and irrigation pipes laid between the plants. Here, the planting scheme includes *Buddleja officinalis*, *Perovskia*, *Salvias*, *Cistus*, *Euphorbias* and *Lavandula*. As you move from the front to the back garden, the planting starts to take on more of a tropical feel with palms, ferns (e.g. *Asparagus setaceus*) and *Agaves* mixed in between *Myrtus communis* and *Lavandula*.



*Front Garden Beds*

At the back of the house, the pool sits centre stage, with a large paved area surrounding it. There is only a small square of lawn (approximately 4m x 10m) made of alternatives to the traditional lawn grass, including *Thyme*, *Achillea* and *Dymondia margaretae*. Surrounding the

pool and paving, the garden is mostly filled with gravel beds with paved paths between them. The plants here are of differing heights and striking forms, and include Aeoniums, Agaves, Callistemon, Strelitzia, Euphorbias, Grevillea and many succulents.



*Dry Garden At Back Of House*



*Alternative 'Lawn' Planted With Thyme, Achillea and Dymondia margaretae*



*Dry Gravel Beds*



*A Low-Growing Grevillea lanigera*

In contrast to the Mexican, hot, architectural and structural feel to this part of the garden, there is a softer, more romantic, French feel to the planting scheme running down the far side of the house to a seating area. Here Marilyn has used Lavandula, Nepeta, Irises and Roses to create this softer feel. In contrast to what I would have expected, Marilyn explain that some climbing and rambling roses do very well in a Mediterranean climate, such as Rosa 'Blush Noisette.'



*Nepeta and Lavandula Soften the Planting at the Side of the House*

By having his garden redesigned, Marilyn explained that her client's water bill has dropped dramatically from approximately 1500 Euros per month to 0 Euros in the winter months, 250-500 Euros per month in the first summer after planting and then 150-250 Euros per month during the summer once the plants are established. The garden is very striking with a huge plant range – it seems an obvious choice over a more expensive and less environmentally-friendly traditional lawn garden.

In the afternoon, we drove from the Littoral to the Serra region and a mountainous area called Monchique. The second garden we visited is set into the mountainside towards the top of the

mountain. Again, there is a pool with a surrounding paved area close to the house, but then the garden spreads out to the sides and back of the house, with lots of beds set at different heights in the mountainside and with paved paths between them.

This garden has been established for longer than the first garden, so the beds are more densely filled with plants, and as it borders the mountainside, it has a backdrop of trees and native woodland plants. As a result, the garden immediately feels much greener than the first garden, and the different heights and slopes provide a new layer of interest that the first garden was missing.



The most obvious thing that struck me instantly here was that bees, birds and many other insects were present in abundance. Some of the plants, such as Salvia 'Royal Bumble' were covered in bees, which was great to see. Marilyn explained that it wasn't that this garden has more pollinator-friendly plants than the first, but rather that this garden is surrounded by natural habitat not the houses and golf course (and subsequent high chemicals usage) of the first.



*Salvia 'Royal Bumble'*



*Salvia and Lavandula Frame View Out to Surrounding Hillside*

The plants of this second garden were much more familiar to me as plants that can be grown in the UK too, such as *Phlomis purpurea*, *Coronilla valentina* subsp. *glauca*, Irises, *Salvias* and *Trachelospermum jasminoides*. Marilyn had planted a very beautiful Bearded Iris, *Iris subbiflora*, which is native to Portugal and was flourishing in the garden. I also really liked *Euphorbia segetalis*, which is low growing with pink stems, green and pink-tipped leaves and lime-green flowers.



*Phlomis purpurea*



*Iris subbiflora*



*Euphorbia segetalis*

We had time at the end of the day to drive up to the top of Monchique, where we were able to walk on their mountain top there. Not many wild flowers were out yet, but we were able to see *Rhomulea bulbucodium*, a small, pretty, low-growing plant with lilac, star-shaped flowers, similar in appearance to a very small Crocus.



*Rhomulea bulbucodium*

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April

Our first visit was to a local garden centre, Caminhos Sombreados, not far from the town we were staying in. On the way, we were lucky enough to spot Naked Man Orchids (*Orchis italicus*) and *Iris albicans* growing on the roadside verges, so we stopped to look at them properly. The Naked Man Orchids were growing in quite large numbers and at eye height on the steep verge, so it was fascinating to be able to see them up close and admire their markings.



*Orchis italicus* Growing on the Roadside

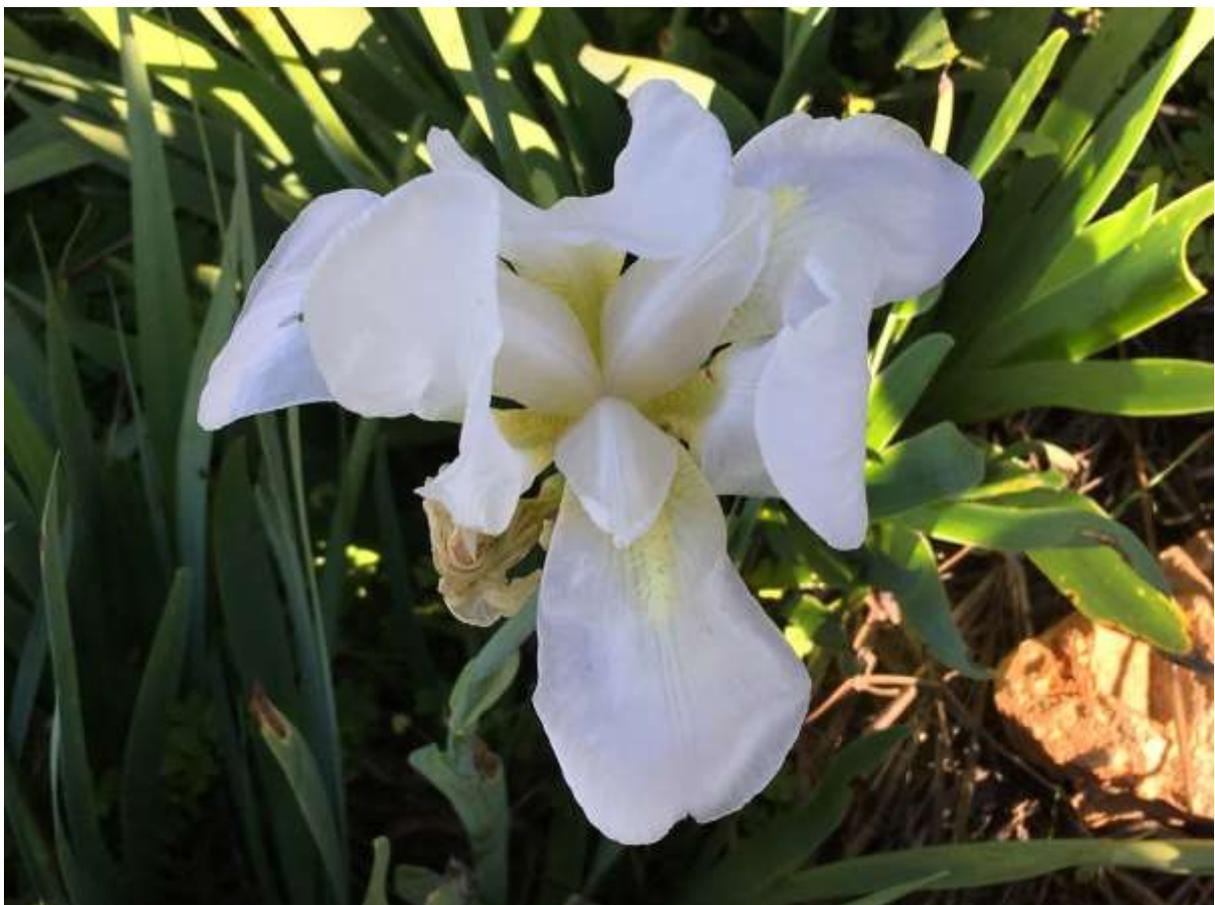


*Orchis italicus* Flower Detail

*Iris albicans* is a beautiful white Bearded Iris that grows freely and naturalises in the Algarve. We saw them in many people's gardens, but they also provided a lovely white display on the sides of roads during many of our drives between gardens.



*Iris albicans* Growing On Roadside



*Iris albicans* Flower

Caminhos Sombreados is a small family-run garden centre and it was an interesting opportunity for us to see what is on sale to the public and at what price, in comparison to what we have seen in gardens yesterday and growing wild at the Quinta da Figueirinha. Many of the plants were those that we had seen in the previous couple of days, such as Lantana x 'Silves Compact', Euphorbia milii, Olives, Palms and Citrus trees. However, other plants were strangely very similar to those in a British garden centre and seemed oddly out of place in the Mediterranean, such as Photinia x fraseri 'Red Robin', Digitalis, and bedding Petunias and Geraniums. The owner Anne told us that business is very much affected by the seasonal nature of residents in the Algarve. Many residents come from places like the UK in March and April, and want an instant garden for the summer of the type that they are used to in their home countries. This affects when there is demand for plants and gardeners, and what type of plants customers are looking for. Anne also told us that the risk of Xylella fastidiosa is very real, as she stocks lots of Olea europaea, Lavandula, Polygola and Nerines. They are visited annually by the Ministry of Agriculture who take leaf samples of all plants and test them for the disease before the plant be deemed safe to sell.



*Caminhos Sombreados Garden Centre*

In the afternoon, we visited the garden of an MGAP member called Margaret, another garden in the Littoral region. Margaret is an architect and so has put her design angle on the garden as well as the house. She has created her garden over 10 years from a lawn and a few Umbrella Pines (*Sciadopitys verticillata*) that were on the site when they moved in. The main garden is behind the house, with a veranda around the house leading down to a pool with pot plants on the paving around it, and then a large gravel garden lies beyond this, with paths weaving around a pond and sitting areas.



*View From the House Over the Garden*

The garden is very beautifully designed, with lots of contrasts within it providing interest. The pond is shaded by tall trees giving a very lush green feel, but then other areas are very dry and arid spots. Hard spiky forms of Agaves and Euphorbia milii are in pots at the side of wavy paths and softer textured plants such as Salvia officinalis, Wisteria, Jasmine, grasses, curved topiary shapes and a cloud-pruned hedge of Myrtis communis subsp. tarentina.



*View Back to The House Showing Contrasting Plant Forms and Heights*

Contrasting heights bring another level of interest, from white Freesias, Scillas and Aeoniums at ground level planted at the side of the paths, up to the Umbrella Pines, and everything in between. Lots of different sized pots positioned at different heights add to this. Colours are contrasted too, with hot reds and yellows of Euphorbias and succulents alongside pastel purples and pinks of Rosa x odorata 'Mutabilis', Agapanthus, and Lavandula.



*Spiky Forms and Hot Colours*



*Freesias at Ground Level*



*Wisteria*

I loved this garden, and it had clearly been very well thought out and designed over the years. There were so many different aspects to it and such a diversity of plants species. I could have stayed and looked at it for many hours, and it was a real privilege to have the opportunity to visit it.

Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> April

Our schedule for the day involved visiting three more gardens of MGAP members, all in an area called Moncarapacho in the Barrocal region.

We were taken around the first garden by the owner Alison, who had been at the property for 13 years. The soil here is very poor and rocky and their water comes from a borehole which draws a lot of salt into the garden. Both of these factors made it very difficult to garden on the site, so in 2011 Alison and her husband started to collect rain water for irrigating the garden in summer months (there is no irrigation in winter) and created a gravel garden around the house. This gravel garden is planted with lots of native and drought-tolerant species such as *Lavandula stoechas* subsp. *luisieri*, *Osteospermum*, *Papaver rhoeas* and many succulents.



*Gravel Garden with Papaver and Lavandula*

There were many plants that we had seen in the other gardens that we visited, so we were gradually learning which plants really flourish in the Algarve conditions. For example, *Polygala mytifolia*, *Euphorbia milii* and *Grevilleas* have been popular choices in all of the gardens.



*Polygala myrtifolia* Flowers

After the gravel garden, we were led through a wild and uncultivated area of land, very similar to the terrain of the Quinta we were staying at. Here, as all over the Barrocal region, plants such as *Cistus albidus*, *Cistus monspeliensis*, *Pistacia lentiscus* and *Phlomis purpurea* were in abundance, and there were also *Ophrys lutea*, *Serapias lingua* (Tongue Orchids) and *Orchis italicus* (Naked Man Orchids) growing in the dry soil. It was a real treat to see so many around our feet as we walked.



*Cistus albidus*



*Serapias lingua*

At the bottom of the garden, Alison has an orchard area and a vegetable plot, where we saw *Iris albicans* and the very beautiful *Narcissus papyraceus* (Paper-white Narcissus) out in flower.



*Narcissus papyraceus* (Paper-white Narcissus)

As we walked back up to the house, Alison pointed out the wild Clematis, *Clematis flammula*, climbing through hedges.

Around the house, Alison has created an area of small island beds which receive shade from the *Ceratonia siliqua* (Carob) and *Acacia* trees close to the house. A paved terrace area with a pond has some raised beds and various climbers such as Jasmine and Wisteria growing on the house walls. In this part of the garden were many more plants that I would associate with a traditionally English garden, such as Roses, Pelargoniums, Wisteria, Primulas and Antirrhinums. The different areas of this garden are so contrasting it almost feels like there are several different gardens on one plot of land.

The next garden we visited was a garden in construction. MGAP member Sue and her husband bought a 2.3-hectare plot of land 3 years ago and they started clearing and preparing for the garden while waiting for planning permission for the house building to be granted. Both the house and garden are currently part-built, so it was interesting to see a garden in the early stages. They have clay soil and until a few weeks before our visit they had had no water on

the site at all. They now have some collected rain water to use on the garden, and plan to collect rainwater and do grey water recycling in future.

A natural, dry garden has been created around the house plot, which is very in keeping with the surrounding Barrocal landscape and has native plants. Existing rocks and boulders have mostly been kept in place, and wavy paths have been created between the beds and the rocks. *Coronilla valentina*, *Daphne gnidium*, *Pistacia lentiscus* and *Phlomis purpurea* were used repeatedly throughout the garden, and a raised gravel bed made from the stones from the land had been planted with succulents.



The plot is very hot and exposed, so Sue is trying a few plants out to see how well they will do, such as some different *Lavandula* varieties, *Pyracantha* and *Jacaranda*. It was very interesting to see and hear about a vision for a garden that has not yet been fully realised, and to hear about the process of trying to get it to come to fruition. I really liked the way that it had been designed to be sympathetic to the natural environment and also blend into the surrounding countryside.

Out to the back of their plot is a hillside where *Olea europaea*, *Ceratonia siliqua*, *Daphne gnidium*, *Nepeta tuberosa* and *Centaurium erythraea* all grow wild. A highlight was being taken to see a clump of wild Tulips (*Tulipa sylvestris* subsp. *australis*) that Sue had found growing near a path at the back of their plot. These were the first wild Tulips I had seen and have a beautiful, delicate yellow-orange flower.



*Tulipa sylvestris* subsp. *australis*



*Tulipa sylvestris subsp. australis*

Our third garden of the day was the garden of Rosie and Rob Peddle, who we had met with earlier in the week. They have been in their property since 2004 and have a 4-acre plot on typical Barrocal land with the trees and shrubs typical of this land growing on it. For example, we saw *Olea europaea*, *Ceratonia siliqua*, *Lavendula*, *Cistus*, *Pistacia lentiscus*, *Prunus dulcis*, *Rhamnus alaternus*, *Callistemon* and *Myrtus communis* as we walked around it, all plants typical of the landscape we had been seeing over the course of the week. Rosie and Rob very kindly gave us a tour of their garden, telling us more about the plot and the work that they have done on it as we went around. We were also joined on this tour by Burford Hurry, the President of MGAP, who shared some of his extensive knowledge with us too. The plot is slightly undulating which gives nice contours to the garden, and there is a small rivulet that passes through it. The plot was abandoned when they arrived, so they have created a native, dry garden on some parts of it, and left other sections of it wild. Over the years that they have been here, Rosie and Rob have cleared the garden area by area to allow more light, air, and water in, and they have also planted more trees for shade. However, overall, their policy has been to create a natural garden, where they use work with what nature provides on their plot rather than intensively gardening, adding lawns or changing too much. They water only newly planted plants, and focus on including only plants that are appropriate to the climate and environment in their garden.



There is a terraced area around the house, where Rosie and Rob have a large selection of plants in pots, and then on the land immediately around the house, native species are growing in abundance. This includes *Cistus albidus*, *Phlomis purpurea*, *Pistacea lentiscus*, *Iris albicans* and the wild Honeysuckle *Lonicera implexa*. We also saw many Orchids here, including Mirror Orchids and Tongue Orchids (*Serapis lingua*).



*Lonicera implexa*

We were then led further from the house into a 'wilder' section towards the back of the house. Rosie and Rob have created some paths through the garden using a bark mulch, but boulders have been left in place. As we walked through the garden, as well as the native species that have been mentioned, we also saw aromatics such as *Thymbra capitata* and *Rosmarinus officinalis*, and bulbs in flower including *Scillas* and *Freesias*. Rosie and Rob pointed out the different species of some of the ground cover shrubs, such as *Lavandula* and *Cistus*. As well as *Lavandula stoechas* subsp. *luisieri*, there is also lots of *Lavandula dentata* var. *candicans*, which has greyer leaves. We also saw four *Cistus* species growing in the garden: *Cistus albicus* (pink flowers with white undersides to the leaves), *Cistus crispus* (low-growing with crinkled leaves), *Cistus salvifolius* (rounder, greener leaves), *Cistus monspeliensis* (think, dark green leaves) and *Cistus ladanifer* (sticky flower buds and leaves, white flowers with purple centre blotches).



*L to R: Cistus salvifolius, Cistus crispus and Cistus monspeliensis leaves*



*Cistus ladanifer*

In one area of the garden, Rob and Rosie have a wild swimming pool, which fits beautifully into the surrounding environment. Around the edge is a planting area which is planted with bog plants, and some Waterlilies and oxygenating grow in the main swimming area.



Between the house and the pool, some raised beds have been created where Rosie is experimenting with planting succulents, and behind this several shrubs line the driveway, including the bright yellow-flowered *Coronilla valentina* subsp. *glauca* and *Senna artemisoides*.



*Senna artemisoides*

The garden that Rosie and Rob have created is a wonderful showcase of how gardening can be done in a way that is sympathetic to the surrounding climate and environment. It is incredibly beautiful and has such a diverse range of plants and different areas within it yet blends seamlessly into the surrounding Barrocal land. We were very fortunate to be shown around and to see such a fabulous example of how dry, ecological gardening can be done.

#### Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April

This was departure day for half of our group, so sadly my trip was coming to an end. However, before our flights, we had time to visit part of the Parque Natural Da Ria Formosa on Faro Island. This is an area of salt marshes, islets and tidal mudflats that protect a warm-water lagoon.

We walked on a small area of the salt marsh, following a boardwalk out onto the marsh. This area was originally home to fisherman who would have come to fish for clams and tuna and who had houses on the salt marshes. The ecosystem is very diverse with vegetation, birds and other wildlife all helping to keep it in a delicate balance. However, with the increase of tourism in the Algarve, the area has become very busy and chemicals from nearby golf courses run off into the sandy soil, so the delicate balance of the ecosystem is under threat. Therefore, the Portuguese government are trying to protect this area of Faro Island again, restricting building and visitor numbers and keeping it as a special wildlife reserve. A large number of wildflowers, fungi and birds can all be seen.

This was a nice opportunity for us to see some of the wildflowers that are abundant at this time of year in the salt marshes. The plants that we saw included *Malcolmia littorea* (Sand Stock) in flower and *Carpobrotus edulis* and *Cistanche phelypaea* not in flower. It was a lovely way to end the trip before boarding our planes.



*Cistanche phelypaea*

## Summary

Overall, this study tour was a wonderful introduction to the plants of the Algarve region, and a brilliant demonstration of the importance of ecological and environmentally-friendly gardening. This is an approach to gardening which I had limited knowledge of before, but I now have a greater appreciation for the importance of gardening in a way that is in keeping with the surrounding environment and climate. The trip highlighted that this approach to gardening, rather than restricting what a garden can be, opens a gardener up to an immensely diverse range of native, wild and usual plants that can be used in many different ways. The complete range of planting ideas and styles in the few gardens we saw over the course of the week demonstrated this very well. I believe that this approach to gardening will become increasingly important in the coming years as the effects of climate change are realised, and so it is an area I would like to explore further in my own work as my training and career progresses. I feel very privileged to have had this opportunity to be introduced to Mediterranean horticulture and horticulturalists through this trip.

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- WaterWise Gardens - <https://waterwisegardens.com/>

## Acknowledgements

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- The Merlin Trust
- The Professional Gardener's Guild
- The Mediterranean Gardening Association of Portugal, with particular thanks to Theresa Chuva, Rosie and Rob Peddle and Marilyn Medina Ribeiro
- All MGAP members who opened their gardens and nurseries to us
- Dr Gerhard Zabel at Quinta da Figueirinha

## Finance Report

I was awarded £150 from the Merlin Trust towards my travel and subsistence costs for this trip. The breakdown how the award was spent is below:

Receipt No.	Date	Description Of Spend	Currency	Amount	FX Rate	Gross £
1	02.03.18	CP Train Lisbon Gare do Orient-Faro 24.03.18	EUR	21.60	0.89	£19.22
2	24.03.18	Lunch from Continente Supermarket	EUR	4.30	0.92	£3.96
3	24.03.18	Dinner at Snack Bar Casinhas, Silves (Photo of Receipt)	EUR	11.00	0.92	£10.12
4	25.03.18	Food Shopping at Lidl Supermarket	EUR	11.29	0.92	£10.39
5	25.03.18	Food Shopping at Lidl Supermarket	EUR	4.25	0.92	£3.91
6	26.03.18	Water and Flu Medicine at Pingo Doce Supermarket	EUR	2.95	0.92	£2.71
7	26.03.18	Lunch at Café Imperio, Monchique	EUR	5.00	0.92	£4.60
8	26.03.18	Evening Meal Shopping at Lidl Supermarket	EUR	6.39	0.92	£5.88
9	27.03.18	Lunch from Pingo Doce Supermarket	EUR	3.09	0.92	£2.84
10	28.03.18	Lunch at Snack-Bar O'Chefe, Moncarapacho (Photo of Receipt)	EUR	12.00	0.92	£11.04
11	28.03.18	Food Shopping at Aldi Supermarket	EUR	10.07	0.92	£9.26
12	29.03.18	Lunch from Supermercado Garrafeira 'Rui', Faro	EUR	15.45	0.92	£14.21
13	29.03.18	Water and Tissues from Lagardere Travel Retail, Faro Airport	EUR	4.00	0.92	£3.68
14	29.03.18	Drink from Lagardere Travel Retail, Faro Airport	EUR	3.20	0.92	£2.94
15	29.03.18	Tea on EasyJet Flight 8921 Faro to London Gatwick	EUR	3.00	0.92	£2.76
16	29.03.18	Train Ticket from Gatwick Airport to Ashford International via London St Pancras	GBP	28.50	1.00	£28.50
17	29.03.18	Food from M&S, London St Pancras Station	GBP	11.67	1.00	£11.67
18	29.03.18	Water at AMT Coffee, London St Pancras Station	GBP	1.90	1.00	£1.90
					Totals	£149.60