



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

On The Wall - Espalier

Naked walls and fences beg for adornment. We suggest a green solution with an espaliered plant. An espalier (es-pal'-yay) is the support and plant itself that grows upon it. The French word is from the Italian "spalliera," meaning "something to rest the shoulder (spalla) against." It may have started with the Romans but was perfected in the Middle Ages when for security, gardens were enclosed in small spaces and growing space was at a premium. The desire to grow fruit trees led to the clothing of walls with what were essentially flat trees. These vertical gardens maximize the use of space. With the proper orientation they benefit from the heat stored and slowly released from the walls that support them. In the spring the tender buds or blossoms are less likely to burn from a late frost, and close to harvest the maturing fruit also benefits.

While it may have started out as purely utilitarian, it developed into an art with various pruning and training methods to artfully produce a maximum amount of fruit. Eventually non-fruit bearing plants also went vertical and crept onto walls. In some cases the espalier is freestanding, becoming a thin hedge that may help define a space or provide a screen. Types of formal espalier patterns include cordon, V-shaped, Belgian and fan. You may also just go freeform or use more whimsical shapes such as hearts.

During our travels to gardens we have seen many espaliers. In France and England their age was impressive. Closer to home and albeit in younger gardens we found them at places you may have visited: The Cloisters in

upper Manhattan, the Biltmore Estate in Asheville and at Mount Vernon in Virginia. Even Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando has them.

At Hortus Oasis we have three espaliers, one of which provides an edible fruit - an arbequina olive tree. The other two are ornamental only, a Lady Vansittart camellia and an Ever Red Sunset loropetalum, both of which provide flowering color well above the ground. All three are on vinyl fences and they are trimmed to grow only a foot or so above the fence. We didn't want to drill and screw into the vinyl so we came up with an alternative method for support - lengths of insulated wire strung vertically top to bottom around the fence panel. On a wood fence, screws or eyelets could be used to support the wire. We use a soft stretchable plant tie without wire to train branches to the support wires and use a freeform informal espalier style without following a rigid pattern.

Clothe that wall or fence, provide shade on a too-sunny wall, place edibles close at hand, or get blossom color at eye level. An espalier can accomplish all of these things.

Selected plants to grow as espaliers in Central Florida include shrubs and small trees:

- Camellia
- Crape myrtle
- Fruit trees (peach, plum, nectarine, citrus, fig, pomegranate, etc.)
- Gardenia
- Juniper
- Ligustrum
- Loropetalum
- Magnolia (Little Gem cultivar for residential sized walls)
- Olive tree
- Scarlet firethorn
- Yew podocarpus



Above, The horizontal T form espalier at Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando.



Above, A palmette form variation with a pear tree at the Cloisters Bonnefort Cloister in New York City.

Far left, Ever Red loropetalum espalier in an informal V-shape at Hortus Oasis.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas, Hortus, Oasis.

Hortus Oasis (FL26000315) in Winter Park is a boutique garden design company specializing in residential, commercial and specialty gardens. Stephen is a registered landscape architect and Kristin is a certified landscape designer. Contact them at 407-622-4886/garden@hortusois.com

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