



The Halloween Garden – A Very Gothic Thing!

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If you are interested in a garden that's a little different than the usual, you may want to consider a Gothic Garden. As the name implies, it lends itself to the macabre. Night flowering plants and night roaming creatures are the mainstay. Since Halloween is fast approaching, you can instantly transform your existing garden to one of Gothic by merely accessorizing. The perfect accessory for any Gothic Garden, besides some lovely gargoyles, would be a moon dial. In addition, you can add an iron fence panel or gate, concrete urns, and any decorative concrete or metalware that makes you feel spooky or feel as if you were in a cemetery or outdoor funeral parlor. Now, you cannot have a gothic garden without some creepy creatures. So begin planning for next year by planting the flora necessary for a Gothic Garden. The first creature to come to mind, of course, is the bat!! Bats are important in nature, and terribly gothic. To increase the bat population around your house, there are two basic things you can do:

1. Provide roosting areas for bats.
2. Grow plants that attract night-flying insects.

The Bat Roost

You can build your own, or there are several sorts available for sale. The bat house holds about a dozen bats, and the single, narrow, bottomless chamber is preferred by male bats, due to the cooler temperature. The bat condo has four chambers, and appeals more to female bats and their young, who prefer a higher temperature environment. This will house between 30 and 50 bats. It's also bottomless. Lastly, the bat mansion has 5 chambers and an attic which will house up to 150 bats. Bats can move up and down inside the house to the most comfortable temperature.

There are also plans available for making bat houses. The important things to remember are:

- Use rough-cut lumber, and turn the rough sides inward. The grooves on the inside help bats to climb and roost.
- Hang the house 12-15 feet above ground on a pole in an area where it gets 7 hours of sun.
- Place the bat house near a water source, or provide one nearby – and make sure it's protected from cats.

Another option, if you live very southerly, is to leave a cabbage palm un-pruned, as this provides a nice roosting area.

Don't be discouraged if you don't attract bats right away. Sometimes it takes quite a bit of time before a bat population will establish itself in an area, but once they do, they usually return. (The chances of a bat house being occupied are increased if the house is hung by early April, and if there are already bats roosting nearby.)

Bat Garden Plants

Plants that should be in a bat garden include: Salvia, Silene, Phlox, Stock, Cornflower, and Spearmint. These plants attract night-flying insects the bats feed upon.

Other Gothic Creatures

Bats are definitely beneficial to have in the garden, since they consume so many insects. However, there are other creatures besides bats which are Gothic and beneficial to have in the garden as well:

Praying Mantis

The Praying Mantis is an insect with which most of us are familiar. They're beautiful as far as bugs go, and almost as gothic as bats, since the female rips the head of the male during the act of procreation. They are also strictly carnivorous, and will attempt to eat any bug they can overpower. You can buy praying mantis egg cases at some larger nurseries, and once the baby mantises hatch, they'll disperse into your garden and eat all the insects they can find. The egg cases should be attached to a twig or plant a foot or so off the ground, with some protective foliage around it. It may take as many as eight weeks of warm weather for the babies to hatch, and once they do, you won't be able to see any difference in the egg case anyway. Each egg case will hatch as many as 200 of the tiny buggers.

Toads

Toads will lend a warty ambiance to your garden, and they love to eat slugs (which can be one of the worst garden pests, and have a particular fondness for Wormwood, a plant many goths might like to grow since it's the main ingredient for absinthe). Provide toads with water for them to lay their eggs in; it doesn't necessarily have to be a pond. Also provide some shelter like a toad house – although a clay pot turned on its side and buried halfway into the ground will do just fine. Be careful spraying pesticides around your toads. Toads in the garden are considered good luck.

Dragonflies

Dragonflies are colorful and, to some people, frightening. However, they are completely harmless to humans. Mosquitoes are a different story; sometimes dragonflies are called “mosquito hawks” since mosquitoes seem to be their favorite treat. (I can’t emphasize mosquito control enough – it seems that mosquitoes are attracted to dark-colored clothing, a crucial consideration for goths.) To attract dragonflies to your garden, make ‘perches’ for them to rest on. Simply put 3-4 foot high stakes in the garden, placed 4-6 feet apart. Don’t use bug zappers. These will kill dragonflies, and don’t tend to kill mosquitoes.

Spiders

I don’t know how you would attract spiders to your garden, but if you find them there, leave them alone. They’re worth their weight in gold in terms of pest control. And there’s nothing like a nice spider web to add some gothy atmosphere to your garden. Of course, you need to make sure the spiders you have hanging around aren’t poisonous.

Snakes

Snakes are a mixed blessing. While they do eat harmful rodent garden pests, they will also eat helpful garden visitors like toads, frogs, and lizards. It’s also important to make sure the kind of snakes you have in the garden are the non-poisonous variety.

That having been said, a good way of attracting snakes is to provide them with a hiding place, like a rock and rubble pile located near the edge of the garden.

Ladybugs

Ladybugs are cute, not gothic. Wrong. Their name, like many plants with ‘lady’ in the name, is derived from the Virgin Mary (Our Lady’s Bugs...). They were considered holy and magical, and many still consider them to be good luck. They are also voracious insect eaters, and, like praying mantises, are for sale in nurseries. When ladybugs aren’t being used, they can be stored in the refrigerator, for regular repeat releases. Make sure and sprinkle some water around before you first release them, since they’re usually quite thirsty. And early evening is the best time to release them, since that gives them all night to settle into your garden and decide that’s where they want to stay.

Night-Flowering Plants

Since you gothy types rarely see the light of day, what good does a flower garden do you? Well, here is the answer: a garden that consists of night-fragrant or night-blooming plants. Of course, you can’t really see that black garden at night. The key color here is white. White glows in moonlight. And there are several varieties of plants which bloom exclusively at night, or whose flowers may be open during the day but don’t release their scent until the evening.

Evening Primrose

“These soft-scented flowers have four satiny heart-shaped petals that come together forming 2-inch open cups with frilly long stamens. When they open in the evening, the blossoms are a soft clear white that

gradually fades into pink as the flowers mature. Their luscious scent reminds us of a cross between honeysuckle and lemon custard. The flowers open every evening throughout summer until first frost.”

Sweet-scented Nicotiana

These nicotianas (yes, that’s the tobacco plant) have creamy-white tubular flowers borne in graceful sprays on softly draping branches. The 2 to 3 inch trumpet-shaped blossoms are closed in the daytime but in the late afternoon and evening they fill the air with a jasmine-like scent.

Moonflowers

These 6-inch trumpet flowers unfurl in slow motion every night just at sunset. Pure white with faint green tracings, the blossoms are very fragrant all evening. By noon, the flowers dwindle and close and are barely seen in the dense foliage.

“Midnight Candy” Night Phlox

“These tidy upright plants bear umbrella-like clusters of small, delicate phlox-like flowers. The insides of the petals are pure white and the outsides are a satiny maroon with a hint of white where petals overlap. During the day, the flowers are tightly closed, just showing a hint of color. As dusk comes on there is a magic moment when they open “like a display of little firework stars, releasing a delicious vanilla-like fragrance that wafts throughout the garden.”

Evening Stock

Many branched 1½-foot plants have gray-green leaves and 1-inch star shaped flowers of very pale violet. The blooms are closed tightly all day but open at dusk to pour out a fantastic spicy fragrance.

Nottingham Catchfly, Night-flowering Catchfly, and White Campion

These are all members of the genus *Silene*, which also has several day-blooming members. These plants have sticky stems, hence the name ‘catchfly’. The odor of the Nottingham catchfly is described as sweet and reminiscent of hyacinths, and its flowers open on three successive nights before withering.

Four o’Clocks

In late afternoon, *Mirabilis jalapa*’s two-inch trumpet-shaped flowers unfurl, releasing a rich jasmine-like perfume. These plants, with blooms in pink, rose, white, orange, and yellow, are very easy to grow and fast growing.

August Lily (fragrant Hosta)

The leaves are about 6 inches long and 4 inches wide, with 8 pairs of impressed veins. The white, waxy, trumpet-shaped flowers appear on 30-inch scapes and each is 5 inches long and 3 inches wide. The scent is of pure honey.

Vesper Iris

A native of Mongolia, the sweetly fragrant flowers are a dull greenish white spotted with brownish purple or reddish purple with white splotches. Like many iris blossoms, they become spirally twisted after flowering.

There is also about 50 different cultivars of daylilies which bloom at night. Some of the favorites are called 'After the Fall' (tangerine and copper blend with yellow halo), 'Jewel of Hearts' (dark red flowers with a red-black center), 'Moon Frolic' (near white), 'Toltec Sundial' (fragrant sunshine yellow) and 'Witches Dance' (dark red with a green throat).

Night-Fragrant Plants

Many plants will have flowers open during the day, but they don't release their scent until evening:

Perfumed Fairy Lily

Chlidanthus fragrans has a rich lily fragrance at night. Three or four yellow, funnel-shaped flowers are carried on stems up to a foot high.

Night Gladiolus

Gladiolus tristis has creamy yellow blossoms that are intensely fragrant at night with a spicy-sweet perfume, and the unusual leaves look like a pinwheel cut in half.

Tuberose

Victorians loved this sweet and heady (almost overpowering) fragrance. The flowers are waxy white and 2 inches long.

Carolina Jessamine

The evergreen leaves surround sweetly fragrant, bell-shaped flowers of bright yellow that are particularly sweet as evening approaches. This grows wild in the South.

Sweet Rocket

Also known as Dame's Rocket, Dame's Violet, and Mother of the Evening, *Hesperis matronalis* is perfect for a night garden. Colors range from white to purple, and the smell, which is released in the evening, is incredibly delicious. They get about 3-4 feet high.

And for a note of interest: Silver Thyme, 'Alba' Eggplant (egg-shaped fruits of glistening white), 'Casper' or 'Boo' white pumpkins and Fraxinella (the gas plant: at night, if you hold a match to the plant, either the plant glows with a blue flame--that doesn't harm it--or the flowers burn with an orange flame and release the smell of lemon into the air).