



COLLOQUE EUROPÉEN SUR LA CONSERVATION
DES JARDINS FRUITIERS ET POTAGERS HISTORIQUES
EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON THE CONSERVATION OF
HISTORIC FRUIT AND KITCHEN GARDENS



**Presentation made by Alix de Saint Venant
at the European Symposium on the conservation
of historic fruit and kitchen gardens
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Why have so many historic fruit and vegetable gardens disappeared?

Why these gardens are disappearing and how to avoid their disappearance is the very theme of this conference. This is a difficult question and this is why we are going to devote an entire symposium to it!

The purpose of this introduction is to try to analyze the different causes of these disappearances

We can unfortunately say that, in Europe, the great majority of historic fruit and kitchen gardens have disappeared; some have been completely destroyed, others are no longer cultivated and survive only by their design of alleys, or sometimes only by their walls or their ruins of walls, or even only their land registry listing. Many have been assigned other uses unrelated to their primary function.

But I will also show some examples of vegetable gardens kept in cultivation since their origin and others that have been brought back into cultivation mainly from the end of the 20th century.

Preserving a kitchen garden probably means going beyond its simple nourishing function and also deciding to preserve gems from the past and their related savoir-faire, another theme of the symposium! The gardens that have survived are those that have adopted new functions and that are trying to strive for excellence in all areas... These are other themes that we are going to discuss. What are the possible uses? What are their advantages and disadvantages?

I will speak here of gardens in France and not address the gardens whose owners or managers will speak in person during these Chambord conversations. They will obviously do it better than me!

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But before studying in detail the fate of different gardens, just a little French linguistics to whet your appetite!

The French word for kitchen garden is "potager". "Potager" derives from "potage" or soup, that is to say the liquid obtained by boiling meat, fish or vegetables in a pot.

Another French word "potagier" refers to the cook who takes care of the vegetables. Mr. Cottereau, in 1555, quotes; "Cooks, "potagiers", and makers of delicate sauces".

"Potager" is first an adjective which has become a noun to mean kitchen garden.



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Olivier de Serres, in “Le Théâtre d'agriculture et mesnage des champs” in 1599, devotes a chapter to the “Ordinance of the “Potager”, both winter and summer”: *We will divide the “Potager” by raised beds, borders, squares, variously named, in order, conveniently and without confusion, to house the vegetable garden there according to their species. ”*

It is interesting to note that in this chapter he immediately addresses two subjects which are still of interest today: The great diversity of the forms of gardening: *It should be noted here that the ways of gardening are very different, and vary, not only from nation to nation, from climate to climate, but from city to city. And the benefits of this diversity: This itself will encourage us to undertake new ways of gardening, not being so praiseworthy to dwell constantly on one’s habits in this kind of household, as it is profitable to change them with reason.*

Diderot, in “l’Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers in 1751”:

A “Potager” is of all the gardens the most necessary for life; this word comes from growing the herbs there to make good soups; it also grows roots, salads, bulbous plants, vegetables, & fruits of vegetable plants. ”

He immediately adds that there may be fruit trees: *“If the “Potager” is cut by walls to multiply the espaliers, the squares must have at least 15 to 20 lengths in all directions to manage beds, borders, alleys around, & a square in the middle to erect large raised beds.”*

The Littré dictionary (1872-1877) soberly notes: *“Potager”, garden where vegetables and fruits are grown. The fruits are therefore present.*

The Larousse dictionary, in 2020 indicates: *“Potager” ou “jardin potager” (masculine name), a plot on which vegetables are cultivated for self-consumption. (It may also feature a number of fruit trees and floral plantations.)*

I will finally add the extended definition found on Wikipedia, which is not without interest for appreciating the changes in mentalities in the 21st century and questioning the new uses that historic vegetable gardens may be called upon to put in place.

A “jardin potager”, or more simply “potager”, is a garden or part of a garden where vegetable crops are grown for family consumption, mainly vegetables, fruits that cannot be grown in orchards and aromatic plants. So, it basically has a utilitarian function, but at the same time this type of gardening can be a hobby or / and a passion and be beneficial for physical or mental health. Finally, it can also have an ornamental function and contribute to the maintenance of animal and plant biodiversity. ”

This last sentence perfectly introduces the new functions which will be discussed in this symposium. How can we develop our historic fruit and vegetable gardens which were generally created to ensure a nourishing function, more precisely to produce fruits and vegetables for a small community (often the owner, his family and his staff)?



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So what has become of and what becomes of these destroyed historic vegetable and fruit gardens? Here are some examples which will show that the destruction, total or partial, could have had multiple causes. We will also see that some places were able to "bounce back" despite adversity, and even - for some - to acquire new forms of excellence.

4

The **Château de Montargis**, in the Loiret, has produced one of the most beautiful drawings to be seen. It is taken from "Les plus excellents bastiments de France", a book published in 1576-1579 by Jacques Androuet du Cerceau.

The castle is presented here in its 16th century condition.

In the 1560s, Renée de France surrounded it with gardens. The pleasure gardens, in the first enclosure, are surrounded by the kitchen garden. We can note, for later, lower left the presence of a small cemetery. Damaged by the wars of religion, the gardens were no longer maintained from 1604 onwards.

A first cause of disappearance therefore: wars.

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Here is another engraving by Androuet du Cerceau . The document on the right is interesting because it includes annotations from 2010, providing for restorations ...

Then the royal garden was razed by Philippe Égalité in 1787.

A second cause of disappearance: the act of the prince!

The castle was sold and demolished in 1810.

The 1849 plan no longer shows a kitchen garden, while that of 1897 sees the reappearance of a small kitchen garden.

A third cause of disappearance: the creation of another garden. This is a fairly common cause, mainly in the 19th century. A most astonishing example is Villandry, which we will discuss later.

6

Here is an aerial comparison between 1954 and 2016. The cemetery grew, new homes and a sports hall were built.

Ultimately, it is the cemetery that best reflects the original drawing!

Since March 2010, 12 squares have been recreated based on the plans of du Cerceau.

The castle has been used by a hotel school and will be auctioned on October 29. Starting price 750,000 euros: if you are interested!

Fourth cause of disappearance - and the most frequent in urbanized areas - real estate pressure ... even if, here, it is also and without wanting to play on words of "last residences" for the cemetery.



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This will not grow vegetables again, but a virtual restitution was carried out in 2019 by “Intelligence des Patrimoines”, a program run by the Center for Higher Studies of the Renaissance in Tours, which offers a new understanding of cultural and natural heritage. We can thus take a video virtual tour of the surroundings of the castle of Montargis and its gardens during the Renaissance.

<https://intelligencedespatrioines.fr/le-teaser-montargis-3d-est-en-ligne-sur-renaissance-transmedia-lab/>

8

Another emblematic place, this one in the heart of Paris: the **Jardins du Luxembourg**.

End of the 16th century: the Carthusian convent is surrounded by fields.

Mid-17th century: Marie de Medici had a palace and French gardens built in the North. The Carthusians occupy half of their area by kitchen gardens and, from 1650, by a nursery of fruit trees.

From 1712, more than 14,000 fruit trees would leave the estate each year.

The French revolution nationalized the nursery, which was saved by Chaptal, Minister of the Interior of Napoleon I. (The charterhouse was demolished in 1800)

Then with Baron Haussmann, the nursery and the kitchen gardens disappear, replaced by buildings.

During the last war the Germans set up potato fields, it is a brief return to a kind of kitchen garden!

Here we meet again the fourth cause of disappearance: the real estate pressure of urbanization

9

Beginning of the 21st century: current views.

Follow the arrow carefully!

Here is the fruit trees collection of the Jardin du Luxembourg, a place of excellence in the cultivation of fruit trees.

The collection now has a little over 1000 trees over 2100 m² and brings together 379 varieties of apples and 247 varieties of pears. The conservation orchard is dedicated to the reconstruction of the Carthusian fruit collection which has received the “national collection” label from the Conservatory of Specialized Plant Collections (C.C.V.S.).

The fruit garden also supports the courses given each year by the Luxembourg Garden School of Horticulture, created in 1809 and attended by approximately 200 people per year.

10

It's not just the kitchen that are disappearing! In Chantilly, Le **Potager des Princes** was first a pheasantry

Louis II of Bourbon-Condé, known as “Le Grand Condé” had the park designed by André Le Nôtre. La Faisanderie was built in 1682 and Le Nôtre made an arrangement for this new construction. Located in the western part of the Chantilly park, on a north-facing slope



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which descends towards the Saint Jean canal, these gardens would consist of a large perspective spread over three terraces and having the Faisanderie in vanishing point as shown in this print by Adam Pérelle and this unassigned plan.

I must say that it is always more difficult to find iconography for kitchen gardens than for "noble" gardens and for architecture ... Here, for Chantilly, we are lucky to have very significant collection:

<https://www.photo.rmn.fr/archive/00-005902-2C6NU0SX2277.html>

<https://www.photo.rmn.fr/archive/00-006820-2C6NU04JKF2M.html>

11

Drawn in pencil, pen and watercolor, this detailed plan of the Kitchen gardens of the Princes of Condé is undated but attributed to Nicolas Breteuil, who signed in August 1724 a plan of the castle and gardens of Chantilly.

A Kitchen gardens therefore replaces the beds of La Faisanderie.

<https://www.artcurial.com/fr/lot-ecole-francaise-du-xviiiie-siecle-breteuil-plan-du-potager-des-princes-chantilly-crayon-plume-et>

12

The gardens are made up of flowerbeds and "small rooms in a row" divided by low walls. This type of arrangement made it possible to experiment with several kinds of planting, exposure, and treatments. The plan also reveals the presence of a "fig farm" as well as a "melon ground", beds or even the "yard where the manure is put".

13

This is a Map of a cavagnole game circa 1780

N ° 96 Les Berceaux des Potagers, N ° 97 La Petite Figuerie, N ° 98 Le Pavillon des Potagers, N ° 99 La Melonnière, N ° 100 Le Potager Bas

<https://www.photo.rmn.fr/archive/07-531660-2C6NU0JN453M.html>

14

And here is a recent aerial photo: we can clearly see here the effects of the real estate expansion, a major cause of the disappearance of the gardens. 3/4 of the gardens have been subdivided. Only the terraces of the original Faisanderie remain.

15

In 1955, photo on the left, the kitchen garden is hardly cultivated any longer.

In 1999 Annabelle and Yves Bienaimé acquired the garden and opened it to the public in 2002 after major renovations.

On the right and below we are in 2018.

So here is an example of a vegetable garden both destroyed and saved, having completely changed its use: the main activity is tourism.



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We are now at **Domaine de Sillery**, in the Paris region. The kitchen garden was in good condition after World War 2, the picture on the left was taken in 1949.

We meet now a fifth cause of disappearance is the pressure of the transport infrastructure and in this case motorways. In 1960, the A6 motorway amputated the north of the kitchen garden. And in 1972 a medico-educational institute was built.

A sixth cause of disappearance is the change in use. The vegetable garden becomes a parking lot and lawns.

17

What gardener does not know this wonderful painting by Gustave Caillebotte, painted in 1878? This kitchen garden would have a stormy story to say the least.

18

The **Caillebotte property** is located in the town of Yerres in Ile-de-France and these two images clearly illustrate the invasion of the built environment in this 19th century park where Gustave Caillebotte produced more than eighty paintings. You can clearly see the location of the kitchen garden.

19

To speak only of the kitchen garden, we see here its state in the 19th century, then in 1950. Nothing had changed.

On the 2006 picture, we see a severely amputated garden, then in 2020 recovered a small part of its surface in the south.

20

The association Potager Caillebotte, created in 2000 and supported by the city of Yerres, maintains and runs the kitchen garden with cultural and educational activities. Since 2011, the kitchen garden covers an area of 1,700 m², or one third of its original area. This flower and vegetable garden is part of the Croqueurs de Pommes and of the Potagers de France associations. Twenty gardeners, all volunteers, cultivate this garden and share their passion with the public. The harvest is shared among the gardeners.

So here is a kitchen garden that has kept its primary nourishing function but it feeds a different group of people!

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In uncultivated vegetable gardens left to their own devices, woody elements will obviously last for some time. Then, nature re-imposes itself and the place will revert to an original state, which geography defines as "optimal state of ecological balance".

In a temperate climate in mainland western Europe, it is forest.



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But it can also, depending on the location, again become a moor or a scrubland.

We are discussing here the seventh reason for the disappearance of kitchen gardens, the one which concerns the greatest number of those that are located in the countryside: **the loss of use.**

22

Loss of use.

We have seen previously that until the 1950s, most kitchen gardens were cultivated. They were cultivated because they were essential for food self-sufficiency.

The turn of the 1950s and 1960s saw the beginning of "modern" and mechanized agriculture, and therefore an acceleration in the rural exodus.

Technical progress, and household appliances, was also reducing the number of people employed on large estates.

A kitchen garden designed to feed around 40 people (for example) was now only cultivated for a few residents.

At the same time, supermarkets were appearing and suddenly provided an abundance of food at reasonable prices all year round and with more choice.

Another reason for the abandonment of kitchen gardens was also their high operating costs – and especially the cost of labour.

The kitchen garden shown here belongs to a small castle in Touraine which has just been transformed into a 5-star hotel restaurant. It will be fully rehabilitated, while keeping two grass squares for receptions. It will therefore find a new dual use!

23

The gardens kept in grass can range from a simple meadow where we can hardly guess the location of an old central basin, to a magnificent ensemble like that of Méréville, whose walls have been restored with the help of Rempart, an association that works for the restoration of heritage with volunteers. I would like to take this opportunity to greet the several people from Méréville who are participating in the symposium.

24

A large number of kitchen gardens have been assigned to other uses, the most frequent being sports and leisure: tennis courts from the 1960s and swimming pools a little later.

This is not surprising, because they are generally located in sunny places and sheltered from the prevailing winds. In addition, they are usually out of sight of the main house.

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Some kitchen gardens have fortunately kept a decorative use often associated with a new economic use, receptions and seminars. The owner then tries to maintain the design of the paths, sometimes also with the borders in the squares.



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It is obvious that it will be easier for these gardens to eventually return, one day, to their original vocation.

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Now let's leave all those beautiful sleeping beauties, hopefully just waiting to wake up, I would like to invite you to a quick and necessarily very incomplete tour of some historic fruit and vegetable gardens still in great shape.

A certain number of them have been a part for almost 10 years, of the Association of the fruit and kitchen gardens of France, more simply called **Potagers de France**. These gardens can be private or public, contemporary or historical, thematic, family, educational; some are imposing and famous, others are modest or little known. They are all open to the public and welcome all together more than 1,000,000 visitors annually.

They came together around three main ideas:

(1) the enhancement of the plant heritage of vegetable and fruit gardens, (2) the transmission of gardening know-how between the gardeners of the member vegetable gardens and of these same gardeners to the visiting public, (3) innovation and experimentation in response to the new contemporary challenges of the nourishing garden. As you can see on the map, the density is higher in the north than in the south, so ... if you are from the south, please join us!

<http://www.potagers-de-france.com/>

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Here is a list of gardens that can be said to have been brought back to life:

1. At the castle of **Montigny-sur-Aube**, a conservation orchard-vegetable garden is being restored based on the initial model dating from the 19th century.
2. The kitchen garden of **Lacroix-Laval** opened its doors in 2012 after major works to restore as well as possible, the 1920 design. It works for the conservation of fruits, vegetables and flowers of ancient and remarkable Lyon origins.
3. Within the extraordinary **hanging gardens of Cohons**, food terraces, designed to house market gardening, vineyards and orchards, have recently been cleared and rehabilitated. Welcome to the large delegation of Cohons present today!
4. The village of **Chédigny**, the only village with the Jardin Remarquable, has designed the Jardin du Presbytère in the image of the 17th century priests' gardens, without forgetting the vines on the hillside.
5. **La Bourbansais** has just recreated part of its kitchen garden in accordance with 18th century proportions.
6. Atypical, the **Champrosay kitchen garden** occupies the site of an old walled orchard. Since spring 2018, around thirty volunteer gardeners have been cultivating the vegetables of their choice, each on their own plot. This initiative is due to Jean-Paul Collaert, author and garden journalist.



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7. The **Château de Craon** has restored the glasshouses of its beautiful kitchen garden.
8. At the national museum of **Port-Royal des Champs**, volunteers from the Friends of the outside association maintain the historic orchard of Les Granges, restored in 1999 in its 17th century form.

28

Let's start in the 16th century our tour of the gardens which have not ceased to be cultivated.

We are in the garden of **Château Dauphin** which is described in 1581 by Michel de Montaigne, returning from Italy and crossing Auvergne. He wrote: *The garden is small, square, the paths are raised by a good four or five feet, the carrés are in the background where there is plenty of fruit trees and few herbs. The sides of the said carrés thus sunk, covered with cut stone "*

To my knowledge, there is no other garden of this type, remarkable for its hollow cultivation squares and its powerful lava rock apparatus. Its walls serve as both wind protection and heat storage. Built under the retaining wall of the castle's farmyard, it serves as a landscape perspective.

Jean-Michel Sainsard, parks and gardens expert in the heritage department of the Ministry of Culture and a man of humor, once said to me: *"If we don't know any other such garden, it may be that it was an attempt which proved unsuccessful! "*

And, indeed, these hollows must also keep the cold that cannot escape, unfortunate fact in this mountain country ..

29

The gardens of **Château de La Chaize** were built in 1674 according to plans by Mansart and Le Nôtre.

Restored since 1968, this star-shaped kitchen garden is unique.

It respects the original plan, and 72 rays have been drawn starting from the central basin.

Significant work has been underway since 2017 and the site is not yet reopened to the public.

30

Mentioned in the archives of 1690, the gardens of the **Château d'Hauterive**, in Auvergne, have kept a similar layout to that of the plans drawn up in the second half of the 18th century and, thus is a rarity, it is the same family who has taken care of these gardens ever since their origin. The restoration of this 9,000 m² kitchen garden began in 1998.

Since 2001, according to an idea borrowed from **Château Dauphin**, plots have been entrusted to Issoiriens, inhabitants of the neighboring town, for them to cultivate.

31

Here is one that is not easy to fit into a presentation! Unbelievably long, the kitchen garden at **La Bussière** was laid out in the 18th century in place of the old vineyard of the castle on one and a half hectares enclosed by walls. In the conservatory orchard, around forty varieties of pear trees and around thirty apple trees structure the paths of the garden. The bottom is an orchard where visitors can harvest red berries



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Created in 1697, the kitchen garden of **La Roche Guyon** was redeveloped at the beginning of the 18th century. In 2004 the vegetable garden was restored to its original layout according to the plans of 1741.

It highlights the interesting question of the visibility of the kitchen garden.

I quote here the online review Prefigurations.com:

"This kitchen garden functions as a pleasure garden as well as a utility garden. This peculiarity places it at the heart of the controversy that developed in gardening treatises in the 18th century: frequently, the authors oppose "gardens of cleanliness or pleasure" to "gardens of utility". Thus, Dézallierd'Argenville favors the former at the expense of kitchen gardens, which "however beautiful they may be, are always placed in remote places, and separated from other gardens; evident proof that they are believed to be more necessary for the usefulness of a house than to increase its beauty and magnificence: these are the things that you have to look for in order to see them and which first of all should not be present to the view of a beautiful garden". The La Roche-Guyon vegetable garden is therefore the perfect counter-example to uses since it is placed so that it can be viewed from the castle and vice versa. "

33

To end this very brief chronological overview, I would like to include gardens that are not usually considered historic, but which are.

These are allotment gardens, now called family gardens.

They can be found everywhere in France, created from the very end of the 19th century by religious or philanthropists.

On the left, the **Volpette gardens**, founded by a priest, Father Volpette. You can see on the map that they are all over the city.

As you can see in the photo on the right, in Versailles, they have not escaped urbanization either, but they have managed to keep their use, always adapted despite the changes of the times.

It is a fine demonstration that the match between a place and its use is the only guarantee of its sustainability.

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And finally, a list of kitchen gardens that have always been cultivated.

1 / Le **Potager des Etournelles**: its creation dates back to 1851 when the ancestors of the current owners asked the landscaper Louis-Sulpice Varé to transform the grounds of the old farm into an English garden and a kitchen garden.

2 / The kitchen garden of the **Du Breuil** school of horticulture, founded in 1867 and installed in the Bois de Vincennes in Paris in 1931, has first and foremost, of course, an educational vocation.

3 / **La Grange-La Prévôté** in Savigny-le-Temple focuses its activity on the preservation and enhancement of cultivated biodiversity in Île-de-France.



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4 / At the **Château de Villaines**, the long, walled kitchen garden extends gently over one hectare. Its original layout was respected during the restoration in 1997.

5 / The **Barbirey-sur-Ouche** kitchen garden, overlooked by an orangery, dates from the 18th century and occupies two large terraces sloping towards the 19th century park.

6 / The **Château de Miromesnil**, in Normandy, produces as many flowers as it does vegetables, in order to maintain the family tradition of the château's bouquets. Beautiful fruit trees cover the orange brick walls.

7 / Here we are in **Chenonceau** where the kitchen garden provides the famous bouquets of the castle, in flowers but also in fruits and vegetables!

8 / **La Bourdaisière** is now famous for its tomato conservatory, certified by the Conservatoire of Specialized Plant Collections. Outside the walls, there is a collection of dahlias.

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Then I will finish with le **Potager du Roi**

It is of course not possible to describe here the long history of this mythical vegetable garden designed between 1678 and 1683 by Jean-Baptiste de La Quintinie, at the request of Louis XIV.

We can simply see that it is certainly the kitchen garden that has the most plans!

Its survival, as with many others, is due to the fact that it has changed uses over the centuries. It is a model of its own on and would probably deserve its own symposium.

Hopefully our first conference will one day be followed by another, entirely dedicated to the Potager du Roi.

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I would like to end by quoting La Quintinie, who would experiment during all his life: he writes "*A good gardener must have a passion for new things*". Olivier de Serres could have made the same statement. Our two masters of historic fruit and kitchen gardens agree and we will try to follow their advice throughout this symposium!