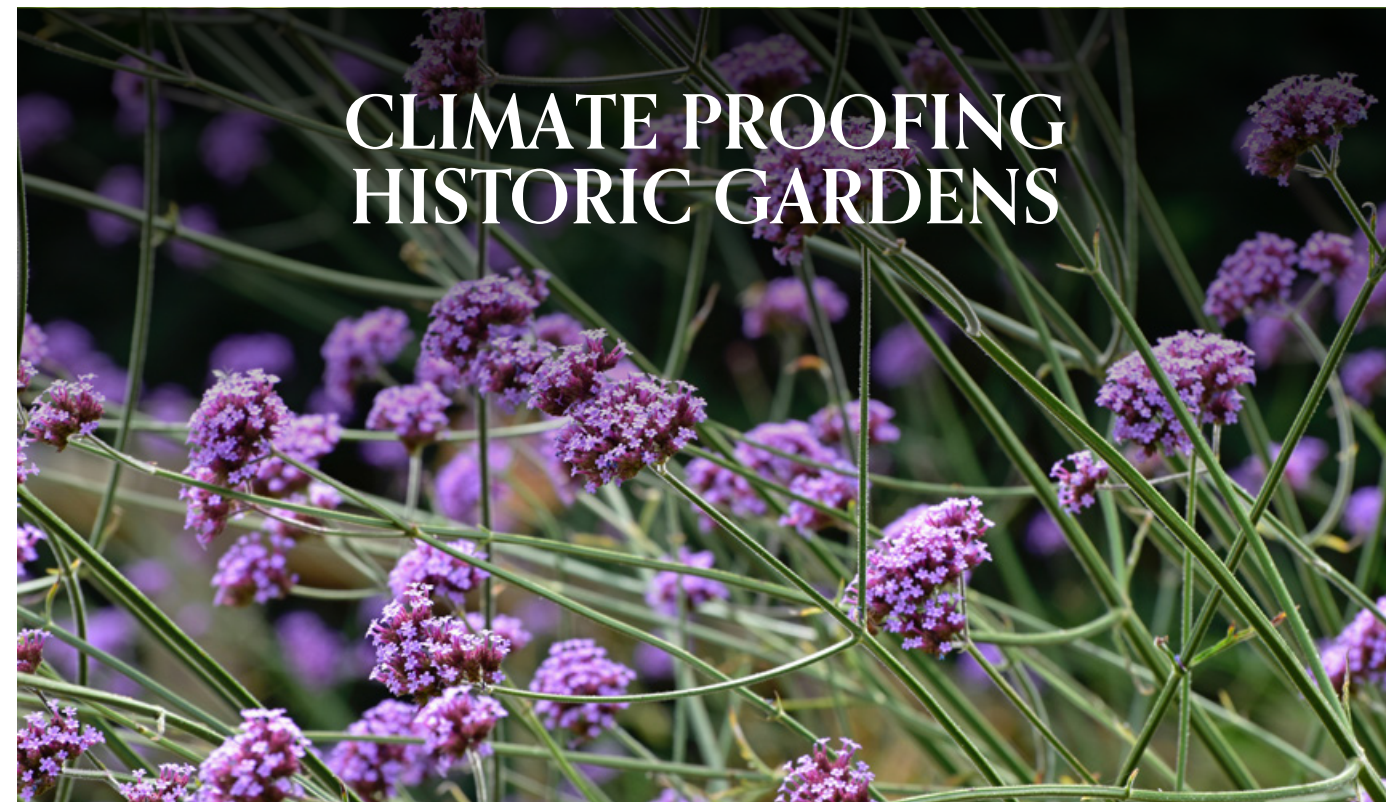




GARDEN

CLIMATE PROOFING HISTORIC GARDENS



Over time, our British gardens have been shaped by the weather along with plant availability and plant trends. In recent years, whether you are a seasoned gardener or a novice, you may have noticed some of our garden classics struggling to adapt to our changing weather patterns. Prolonged dry spells, unpredictable rainfall, warmer winters and more frequent heatwaves are challenging the planting schemes that have been in historic landscapes and gardens for generations.

For owners of listed properties, the challenge is how to preserve the character and heritage of a historic garden while adapting to a changing climate. Gardens of older properties were nurtured and developed at times when rainfall was more reliable and summers were generally cooler. As a result, today's large herbaceous borders, thirsty lawns and moisture loving plants are often less resilient against today's weather extremes. Young trees and shrubs are

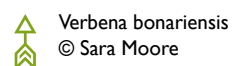
particularly vulnerable, while mature specimens can suffer stress leaving them more vulnerable to pests and disease.

Climate proofing a historic garden is about keeping its spirit while introducing plants capable of tolerating future conditions. The answer is not to ditch traditional styles but to reinterpret them.

Many drought tolerant plants already form part of our British garden history, particularly in south-facing walled gardens and courtyards that create warm microclimates. When selecting plants, consider species that complement the architecture and historical character of the property with a nod to the property era. Silvery and grey-leaved plants are particularly drought resistant as they reflect the sunlight; while plants with small, narrow leaves lose less moisture through evaporation.

DROUGHT-TOLERANT PLANTS

Silvery leaved plants like lavender sit very comfortably in a historic garden. Long associated with cottage gardens, manor houses and formal knot gardens, lavender thrives in poor soils and dry conditions once established. Its fragrance, evergreen structure and extended



flowering season make it a valuable addition to borders and pathways. White flowering cultivars can offer an interesting alternative to the more familiar purple varieties.

Cotton lavender, (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*) forms neat silver mounds that suit formal gardens, courtyards and path edges. Its drought resistance and compact habit make it an excellent alternative to more water demanding plants. If you are not keen on the yellow flowerheads of this species, try *Santolina etrusca* which has creamy-white button flowers.

The various cultivars of Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) work especially well with ornamental grasses and provide late summer colour with its blue flower spikes. The aromatic foliage dies off in the winter revealing sturdy, white stems that create striking structure throughout the winter months.

The beautiful silver-leaved shrub, *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* offers striking architectural form and exceptional drought tolerance. It provides all year round interest and works well in gravel gardens and mixed borders.



Lavender
© Sara Moore



Salvia
© Sara Moore



Euphorbia
& Verbena
© Sara Moore



Flattened
flowerheads
of Achillea
© Sara Moore



Drought resilient flowering perennials such as *Verbena bonariensis* are familiar features in gardens. Although native to South America, this perennial has become a staple of British planting schemes. Its airy structure allows it to weave through traditional borders without appearing intrusive, while its long flowering period and resilience make it invaluable in dry conditions.

Catmint (*Nepeta sp.*) combines perfectly with roses and cottage garden planting whilst coping well with dry conditions. The evergreen, low maintenance shrub *Cistus sp.* also performs well in drought conditions, alongside flowering perennials such as *Achillea*, *Limonium*, *Verbascum*, *Agapanthus* and *Sedum*.

Classic Mediterranean herbs and ornamental grasses can sit well alongside traditional planting schemes while requiring significantly less water. Herbs such as rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) were historically grown in Tudor herb gardens along with traditional culinary herbs including sage and thyme. These herbs can provide structure, fragrance and resilience during dry periods while offering interest in the garden throughout the year.

THE LAWN

The immaculate green lawn has become one of the most water-intensive features of many gardens. Historic landscapes often contained a more diverse mix of meadow and orchard than modern gardeners realise. Allowing some areas to develop into wildflower meadow can reduce water requirements while enhancing biodiversity and less maintenance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TREES

Mature trees are among the most valuable assets in any historic landscape. They provide structure, shade and help moderate temperatures and offer a wide range of additional environmental benefits while contributing to the character of a garden.

When introducing new trees, selecting species capable of coping with warmer summers is becoming increasingly important. UK native favourites such as oak (*Quercus robur* & *Q. petraea*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and our only native maple, field maple (*Acer campestre*), continue to perform well.

For adding structure with tree planting, consider olive (*Olea europaea*), pine (*Pinus sp.*) and strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), all of which are

excellent choices for a warm, sunny positions and require relatively little moisture once established.

HEALTHY SOIL

Improving soil health can often provide greater benefits than simply increasing irrigation. Incorporating organic matter and mulching borders with well-rotted manure or compost helps reduce evaporation, improve soil structure and suppress weeds that compete for water.

Historic gardens have always evolved. New plants arrived through trade, exploration and changing trends. Climate adaptation should be viewed as part of this continuing tradition. By selecting resilient plants, improving soil health and making thoughtful planting choices, owners of listed properties can keep the beauty and character of their gardens while helping maintain their longevity in a changing climate.

Sara Moore

Planterra Gardens

sara@planterragardens.co.uk

www.planterragardens.co.uk