

# Garden Notes

## Wood structures in the garden



Photos by Arca Design Group

### Redwood fence and gate.

By Suzanne Arca

Throughout history wood has been used as a building material for shelters, weapons, and fuel. It can also be found in all cultures as a strong component of the built landscape. Fences, arbors or trellises and gates dating back to A.D. have been documented as built from wood, a relative-

ly lightweight, flexible and workable material that can easily span long distances. Redwood, cedar and pine have been used out of doors for centuries. The ability to withstand rot is an important factor in outdoor construction, and wood such as pine needs to be treated to fend off the rotting process. There are environmentally friendly treatments that make this a viable option for pine to be used as framing material that will be in contact with the soil or



### Cedar and steel arbor.

wet surfaces.

On the other hand, redwood and cedar have heartwoods in their inner core that act as natural preservatives against decay. There are also some exotic woods, such as a Brazilian hardwood called Ipe, Brazilian walnut or Lapacho. This wood is beautiful with a tight grain and very durable.

There are many types of wood suitable for outdoor construction.

Wet surfaces.

Wood elements such as fences in

the garden have been used to help define spaces, for privacy, or to demarcate property lines. Fences can enhance the beauty of your home and architecture as well as serve an aesthetic backdrop for the plantings within its walls. A fence can also embellish the visual interest of your garden in those barren winter months when there is less in bloom and plants are in leafless dormancy. It can be a simple design and blend into the background or can be highly detailed and articulated so as to become an architectural extension of the house and other built elements.

A well-detailed and ornamented arbor or trellis can create a space in which to view a garden or frame a view. These elements are descended from historic grape arbors used to support the grapevines laden with their fruit. In our gardens today they can serve to create not only support for a vivacious flowering vine or rose, but also showcase whatever plant you have chosen in a glamorous way with articulated end cuts, and timber sizes that reflect the stature and style of your home.

An arbor may also create a sense of intimate enclosure or "space-making" that would be perfect for a single bench on which to rest or view your garden from a well thought out vantage point.

Gates create an entrance to the garden and can be a grand gesture or understated to blend with an adjacent fence. Technically a gate can be seen as a barrier but it also signals that there is something beyond. How you design that element will set the tone and be a window into your garden space. That window may reflect a rustic garden aesthetic with unsurfaced wood and natural shapes. It could also be formal and painted to match the trim of your home. A wild color on a gate may bring a sense of whimsy to the entrance and an anticipation of a playful and casual garden beyond. Adding other materials and details to the gate, such as metal framed windows, or elaborate hardware creates a richness and articulation which draws your attention to this very important entrance.

Wood elements in the garden help create the synergy in our outdoor spaces created when all the elements in the outdoors come together. There is life energy, a natural healthiness and sense of growth that wood evokes. Use it. Be playful, formal or discreet, and enjoy the enhanced layer of beauty and connection it brings to your home and garden.

*Suzanne Arca teaches horticulture and design studios at Merritt College and UC Berkeley Extension. She is an award winning landscape designer and contractor at Arca Design Group, Inc. Visit [www.arcadesigngroup.com](http://www.arcadesigngroup.com) or call (510) 558-0636.*