



REEP

Religions & Environment
Education Projects

Creating an Anglo-Moroccan Garden for Shore to Shore

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I applied to be involved in the Shore to Shore project after receiving an email about the opportunity via Mike Calnan, and was lucky enough to be selected.

I was in Morocco for 25 days, along with Rhiannon from Chartwell and Rob from Blickling. We each had a garden project to manage. Rhiannon was in charge of designing and building a school garden at Lycée el Jadida in Essaouira; Rob, a sensory garden at OAPAM School for blind children in Marrakech; and myself an Anglo-Moroccan Shakespeare garden at Cadi Ayyad.

As you can see from the pictures, we really did start from scratch, each of us creating designs for the sites based on information provided by REEP, and from the site surveys we carried out on an earlier weekend visit in February.

There was quite a challenge finding contacts who could help us source materials and labour – this was not a case of popping to your local B&Q or ordering from LBS! Luckily, after almost a week of somewhat slow progress in Marrakech, a landscaper who was helping in Essaouira introduced us to three young Civil Engineers. As well as organising and supervising labour for the construction elements of my garden, they took us to the ‘real’ souks of Marrakech to source materials (and help us keep the prices down), and even created a 3D computer image of my garden to help interpret the design to people at the university.

For my garden, we decided on a traditional Islamic design, incorporating enclosure, shade and water, with traditional rammed earth raised beds, filled with plants that were available in the UK during the Elizabethan period (that would obviously also survive the climate in Marrakech). The nursery had an extensive catalogue to aid plant selection – but if what you

asked for wasn't available, then you'd find a mystery alternative in its place...

Though we longed to use the traditional and green method of rammed earth for our walls, we discovered once we had found an artisan that there would not be enough time for them to dry before the garden was due to be opened. And so we made a compromise, and constructed the walls from concrete blocks, with a coating of the rammed earth to give the visual effect we were after.

As the opening of the garden drew nearer, other compromises were made – we shall have to go back to complete the stage and install the rill and fountain at a later date, some areas of tiling became coloured gravel and pergolas changed shape, size, and design on the spot to ensure we had a finished garden in time.

As well as the obvious benefit of gaining experience in managing a project from start to finish, and of gardening in a completely different environment, I shall never forget the time I spent in Marrakech. The project was inspiring, and taught me how comparatively easy we have things here in the UK when we are doing such a project – nothing seems to be written in stone in Morocco, so you just have to go with it and make the best of what you can get hold of. This may have felt difficult, were it not for the support of everyone out there – they all put in so many hours to make sure our plan came to life.

