



# REEP

Religions & Environment  
Education Projects

## Creating an Educational Garden for a School in Essaouira

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This year REEP, aided by the Martin McLaren Trust, invited three National Trust gardeners to join the Shore to Shore project: Robert Wiskin from Blickling; Deanne Lewis from Montacute; and myself from Chartwell. We were invited to spend a month in Morocco working on the creation of three gardens for communities with limited resources and little to no experience of gardening, with each gardener given creative responsibility for one of the three distinctly different gardens.

Deanne's brief was to design an Anglo-Moroccan Shakespeare Garden for the Faculty of Arts & Human Sciences at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech. This garden explores the links between Elizabethan gardens and traditional Islamic garden design, and celebrates Shakespeare's awareness of new worlds. With daub-effect (adobe) raised beds, rustic Eucalyptus-pole pergolas and stage, and sensitive fusion of time-honoured Moroccan and English plants, the Anglo-Moroccan Shakespeare Garden provides students with not just relaxation but an open-air performance and learning space.

At the OAPAM Institute in Marrakech Rob helped to create a sensory garden for blind and partially sighted students, exploring the use of different sounds, textures, tastes and aromas. A quadrangle encased by a cloistered walkway, the sensory garden is filled with mature citrus trees and features central raised beds constructed of rough-barked eucalyptus and smooth, planed pine. Tasty herbs, sweetly-scented flowers and soft-textured grasses fill the beds, while interesting textures such as argan nut shells crunch underfoot, and glass jars on posts open to reveal the scintillating scents of the souks.

At Lycée el Jadida in Essaouira, I helped to create a school garden, providing students with an outdoor space for learning and relaxation. The garden will be used to educate students about Islamic garden design principles and the importance of environmentally-sustainably gardening

in a dry climate. Divided into multiples of four to represent the four corners of the universe, it features a stunning 25-metre-long mural painted by the art teacher and pupils, a decorative tiled fountain, a pergola, brightly-coloured raised beds and containers, and a range of plants adapted to dry climates, including cacti and succulents.

We learnt so much from our experiences in Morocco that I'm not sure we will ever quite garden in the same way again. We learnt to use an entirely new plant palette (*Cleistocactus strausii* anyone?) and gardened in a hotter, drier climate than any of us could dream to experience over here. We also worked to a different set of values: the Moroccans involved in the creation of the gardens thought nothing of the 13-14 hour days that were at times required to get the gardens ready for opening. Health and safety was refreshingly relaxed and commonsensical, yet meetings were not always the most punctual of affairs. Language was a barrier at times, but with a bit of enthusiasm and a lot of gesticulation we were able to communicate most of our ideas and plans.

Engaging with the students and teachers was especially rewarding. At OAPAM the children taught us to take new sensory enjoyment from everyday garden tasks such as mowing a lawn or sawing or drilling a piece of wood, whilst at El Jadida and Cadi Ayyad we saw how our work could have a spiralling effect, inspiring a host of other horticultural projects, such as gardening and environment clubs, gardening lessons, blogs and dissertations, and even a school nursery!

