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MISS GERTRUDE JEKYLL AND MEDITERRANEAN PLANTS

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Francis Jekyll noted in the Memoir of his Aunt 'Bumps' that, 'there is no doubt that her lifelong partiality for evergreen and aromatic plants – the myrtles, cistuses, salvias, and phlomisies with which she surrounded her houses and those of her friends – can be traced directly to the raptures of her first acquaintance with the flora of the Mediterranean sea-board'.¹

Miss Jekyll is well known for the plants she collected from cottage gardens and from the wild in Britain, testing them for their hardiness and as plants worthy of display in gardens. But she is perhaps not immediately associated with the rich Mediterranean flora, except for lavender, rosemary and some irids. However, thirty-five plants from the Mediterranean were grown in her garden at Munstead Wood for inclusion in the plant nursery catalogue and a further eight from areas with a mediterranean-type climate. She wrote at least 95 articles describing individual plants from this area and her books contain many references to the plants of the Mediterranean. It is clear from these references that she was growing and trying at Munstead and Munstead Wood many more plants from the Mediterranean than she made available from the plant nursery.

The typical climate of the Mediterranean is characterised by long hot dry summers with average temperatures of 20-24° C and cool wet winters of 4-7°C. In countries around the Mediterranean Basin that Miss Jekyll visited, lower temperatures and wetter conditions occur in the mountains and plants are adapted to the drying cold spring winds from the north – the *mistral* in southern France, the *bora* in the Adriatic, as well as the summer *meltemi* in the Aegean – or hot dry winds from the south – the *scirocco*. Similar strong but diurnal winds blow onshore and offshore along parts of the Californian coast. In addition, the plants are adapted to a range of local conditions, such as exposure, proximity to the sea, rock type and soils, all of which Miss Jekyll noted.