

# Growing Thoughts: a Garden in Andalusia

In this beautiful book, which features numerous full-page colour photographs, Carlos March, a businessman and nature-lover, relates the story of his garden in Altarejos, located in the foothills of the Sierra Morena, to the north of the Province of Seville. Surrounded by wild mountain pastureland, among rocks and slate slopes replete with rock roses and holm oaks, this spectacular garden in Altarejos is stocked with three hundred varieties of roses and more than four hundred species of trees, bushes and covering plants. After thirty-five years of careful work, this garden represents a prime example of balance and respectful integration with regard to the environment. The history of its creation and its meticulous and ongoing development, together with its achievements, successes and failures, also tells the story of its creator, in his capacity as a nature-lover, gardening enthusiast, hunter and photographer.

Carlos March is the chairman of Banca March and of Corporacion Financiera Alba, and Vice-Chairman of the Fundacion Juan March. He is an entrepreneur with a passionate interest in nature, gardening and hunting.

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## Chapter 2 - The environs. Hunting

I bought Altarejos in 1975 so as to have my own reserve for wild partridge drives, with a house and garden that would be respectful to the environment.

Where hunting was concerned, the estate had what I believe to be the four indispensable requisites: a minimum surface area of two thousand hectares, a good stock of partridge at large in the countryside, beauty and isolation.

### The surface area. Game reserves

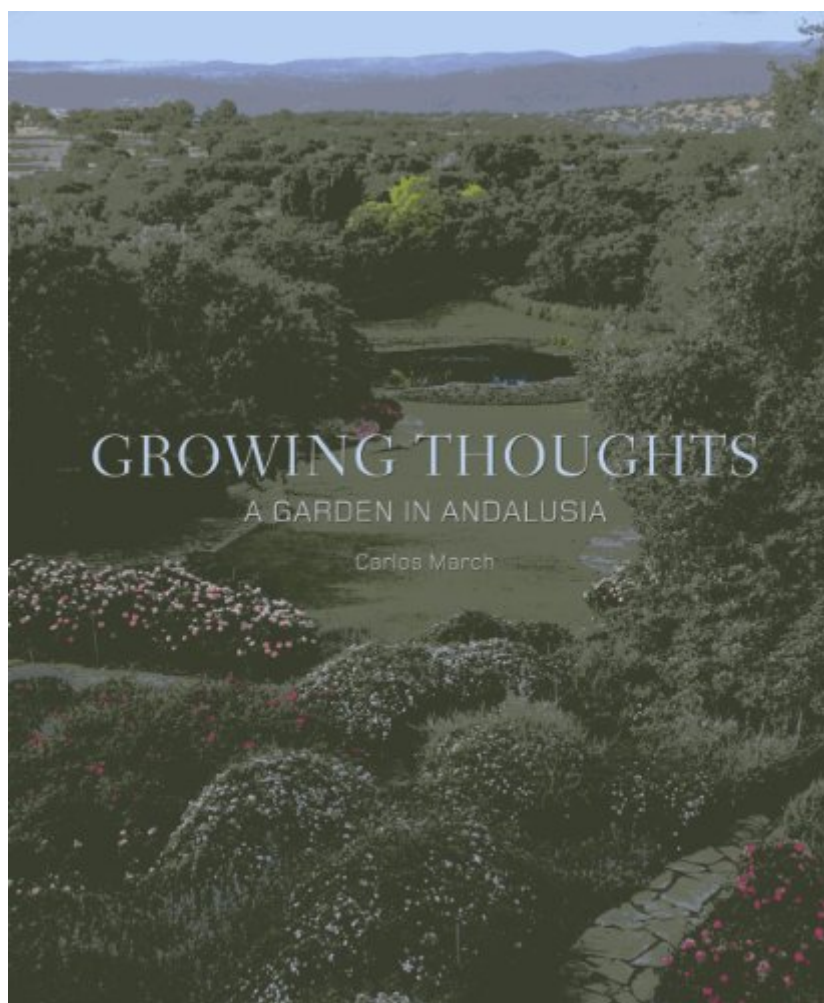
Of course, the number of hectares indispensable for a collective hunting reserve is relative. It depends on the breeding and hunting average per hectare for partridge in each area of Spain. Excluding the whole of the northern part of the country above Madrid, where the cold winters and altitude are alien to the natural habitat of Spanish partridges, and eliminating also those regions suffering from the pernicious effects of population density, where man is the main predator, there remain only six provinces in Spain where intensive hunting with line drives is possible: Toledo, Ciudad Real, Albacete, Badajoz, Seville and Cadiz. Three of these are in Castile-La Mancha, two in Andalusia and one in Extremadura. Powers over environmental and hunting regulation were

transferred by the State separately to each of these three different autonomous regions, leading to a chaotic lack of co-ordination in applying the current legislation.

In the sixties, the province of Madrid had several private estates with extraordinary partridge shooting, as well as a number of magnificent municipal reserves. Today, those reserves have vanished amidst holiday homes and cement monsters, one effect of the rapid increase in the population of the Madrid region.

The case of Toledo is similar to that of Madrid, but rather less intense. Besides another historic private estate, El Castanar, there were dozens of municipal reserves, like Valmojado, Casarrubios, Camarena, Chozas, Fuensalida and Mentrída. Between 1960 and 1980, these villages achieved astonishing quotas of partridge per hectare, always higher than 1.5 in normal seasons. I shall never forget the reserve at Valmojado, which my brother Juan and I leased for twelve years. In two hunts making up a single cuartel - a term used for five drives over a territory of about one thousand hectares - we once killed two thousand five hundred partridges! They were large birds that flew sluggishly over the vineyards, the stubble and the dry, wind-beaten and dusty earth, but we enjoyed ourselves immensely because, among other things, it was all we had. In spite of motorways and industrial estates, wild partridge is still hunted in the area, though its density per hectare has fallen to twenty per cent of what it was in the golden years.

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Carlos shares vistas, plans, plants and more. He talks to us as if we are walking through the garden with him, sharing his thoughts and love of the place he has created. This book gives a real insight into the garden. He is not only opening his garden, he is also opening his soul. This is a wonderful book for anyone interested in gardens. Recommended.