**Pergola**

– noun: a horizontal wooden framework with vertical supports, attached to a house and often with climbing plants trained over it, used for recreation.

*Australian Oxford Dictionary*

---

**The story behind the Word of the Month**

The word *pergola* was borrowed from Italian into English during the seventeenth century. In Italian it meant: ‘a framework over which climbing plants are trailed, a covered shelter.’ In the 1989 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary the definition for the ‘Englished’ *pergola* was: ‘An arbour formed of growing plants trained over trellis-work; esp. a covered walk so formed.’ In a revision of this entry for the online edition of the OED (2005), this definition was fleshed out a bit: ‘An arbour; a covered walk or shelter (usually in a garden), esp. one formed of growing plants trained over a (usually wooden or metal) framework; this framework itself.’ The definition is illustrated by the following quotations:

1664 R. Pratt Note-bk. in R. T. Gunther Archit. Sir Roger Pratt (1928) 121 Ye *Pergola* rownde ye Hall how to bee framed.

1676 J. Evelyn Philos. Disc. Earth 156 ‘Twixt East and North erect a Pergola or Shed, so contriv’d with a cover, as to exclude or admit the rain, snows and weather at pleasure.

1849 J. Ruskin Seven Lamps Archit. ii. 43 In the cupola of the Duomo at Parma we might have taken the vines for a veritable pergola.

1896 M.D. Fairbairn in Daily News 15 Sept. 6/1 The pergola, or vine-clad arbour, is before the door.

1938 Amer. Home June 27/1 Balancing the entrance arch at the other end of the garden is a rose pergola with a seat beneath it.

1965 J. Didion Slouching towards Bethlehem (1968) iii. 215 A shadowy square with a filigree pergola for the Sunday band, a racket of birds, a cathedral in bad repair with a robin’s-egg-blue tile dome, a turkey buzzard on the cross.
Pergola

– noun: a horizontal wooden framework with vertical supports, attached to a house and often with climbing plants trained over it, used for recreation.

Australian Oxford Dictionary

In these examples the structure of the pergola is quite separate from the structure of the house, and the pergola is generally some kind of trelliswork structure, over which plants are grown, and large enough for a bench to be placed under it. Most Australians would feel that this is not quite what we now regard a pergola to be.

In the revised online edition of the OED, a new sense (or a variant sense) is added at the end of the basic definition: ‘Also: a small open-sided shelter or sunshade usually consisting of a roof supported on columns.’ This new sense is illustrated by only one quotation, and it is from the Sunday Times in Perth:

2001 Sunday Times (Perth, Austral.) (Nexis) 3 June, The dining and family areas open onto a paved courtyard with a thatched pergola providing shade in summer and protection from winter rain.

The definition is close to what Australians understand by the term pergola, which might be expressed in this way: ‘a horizontal wooden framework with vertical supports, attached to a house and often with climbing plants trained over it, used for recreation.’

The Australian pergola is therefore significantly different from what is understood by a pergola in other parts of the world. In Britain and America the primary stress in the word is on the first syllable: per-guh-huh. In Australia the stress is typically on the second syllable: per-goh-luh. The Australian word is therefore also marked by a difference in pronunciation.