

OXFORD AUSTRALIA
**WORD
OF THE
MONTH**

August 2011

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

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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 **Pergolo** 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.*

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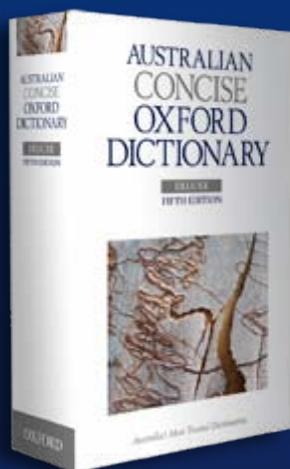


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Australian Oxford Dictionary

Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary
5th Edition



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.