



Land on your feet

A beautiful garden like this needs to be carefully maintained - it belongs to the property opposite in Deux-Sèvres

Dreaming of buying a property sitting in acres of grounds? Many people do, but is it the right move for you? **Jessica Randell** delves into the realities of owning lots of land in rural France to make sure you keep both feet firmly on the ground!

So, you've decided to make the big move and put down roots in France? An exciting decision, and now the fun can really begin as you start hunting for that dream property! You will most likely already have a property spec for your new house, but you may be wondering how much outdoor space you need. The longer, warmer summers mean you will probably want some outdoor space, but there are many different aspects to keep in mind when hunting for a place with land in the French countryside.

Rural France is a beautiful mix of small towns and villages, remote hamlets and secluded properties surrounded by miles and miles of countryside. Each setting offers its own unique living experience and it's a good idea to think about which one corresponds best to your needs, wishes and family. Towns and villages mean more facilities compared to hamlets or rural spots, while hamlets and secluded properties often mean

more privacy and outdoor space. But which one is right for you and your situation?

REALITY CHECK

I remember my parents showing me the photos of the first property they bought in France and being amazed at how big the garden was compared to our tiny cottage garden in the UK! It was in a small hamlet and neither of our neighbours had children of a similar age to myself or my siblings. While we have great memories of living there, within a few years we had moved to a small village where there was slightly more going on. That dream of having lots of outdoor space wasn't right for our family, and the property we moved to had a smaller and far more manageable garden!

It's relatively common to see people moving over from the UK and wanting to buy somewhere with no near neighbours and lots of land, as these are hard to come by in the UK. However, the reality of having multiple

acres doesn't always match up to expectations.

It's important to consider how much space you really need. Of course, if you have a specific reason for needing a field or two, such as you want to keep animals or you have horses, then you are going to need plenty of land. In these cases, you are most definitely going to want to start searching for a fairly remote property.

Equally, if you don't want any neighbours, then looking for a secluded property with plenty of land surrounding it, a large garden, an adjacent field or two or even some woodland to give you a privacy barrier is probably the best option. Keep in mind that you will have to drive everywhere, as it is unlikely there will be facilities within walking distance.

However, if you don't have a specific need for lots of land, then it's a good idea to carefully consider where you want to live. If you wish to be based in a small town or village, then you are likely to have to settle for a smaller-sized garden. Most

villages in rural France have properties with some sort of garden or terrace, just maybe not a large garden offering endless possibilities!

On the outskirts of a village, you may find properties with decent-sized gardens and still be within walking or cycling distance of that lovely *boulangerie*, popular restaurant or buzzing bar in the centre. This offers the best of both worlds - sufficient space and privacy without being isolated.

SIZE MATTERS

It's important to keep your expectations realistic; unless you need lots of land, maybe you don't need to buy acres just because you can. But how big does your garden need to be?

If you are buying a holiday home, consider a smaller garden or you'll be mowing the lawn and weeding and maintaining your land for most of your holiday. You might also need to hire a gardener to keep your plot in check while you're away, which isn't ideal for a place you just want to enjoy.



€689,000

BEAUVILLE, LOT-ET-GARONNE

A quiet location for this charming and characterful spacious five-bedroom, four-bathroom farmhouse with stunning views over the valley. The property sits in grounds of over two hectares and has a superb barn with summer kitchen and shower room.



€329,900

ST-COUTANT, DEUX-SÈVRES

A charming three-bedroom, two-bathroom 'longère' set in just under 1.5 acres of private, south-facing, beautifully maintained gardens with wonderful views of the countryside. There's even a pond, vegetable garden, barn and two greenhouses.



€318,000

AUVILLAR, TARN-ET-GARONNE

A three-bedroom, two-bathroom renovated stone property, all on one level with a manageable garden. It's on the edge of a pretty village with a restaurant and school, and just a few minutes' drive to Auvillar. The property comes with a pretty stone barn too.



€141,700

VARAIGNES, DORDOGNE

A beautiful two-bedroom, two-bathroom stone-built property in the heart of a village with shops and a restaurant. It has more than a third of an acre of gardens with views over fields to the rear, plus an enclosed courtyard, garage and wood store.

Lock-up-and-leave properties in small villages make good holiday homes as they offer the best of both worlds: no additional cost or bother of maintaining a garden, but you'll still be surrounded by beautiful countryside for walks, bike rides or picnics.

If your move is permanent, then really take the time to consider how big a garden you should go for. Do you really want to have to put on your hiking boots just to mow the lawn? Exactly how passionate are you about gardening? And will you still be that passionate or able in a few years' time?

I was adamant last summer that I could make some lovely

hanging baskets and keep them alive despite having watched my newly purchased spider plants and cacti wither throughout lockdown. I tottered off to my local garden centre one Saturday morning and spent a small fortune on plants I'd never heard of, pondered over which soil to get (who knew there were so many types!) and picked out some lovely wicker hanging baskets. Unfortunately, I don't really have a knack for this sort of thing and my hanging baskets ended up much like my lockdown plants.

I'm sure your gardening skills are far better than mine, but it is still a good idea not to

take on too much. Gardening is a skill you need to dedicate time to learning. If you have lots of land, you will need to know how to deal with things such as damage by animals, for example. Wild boar and deer are plentiful in the countryside and can make quite an impact on a garden overnight!

THE OUTDOOR LIFE

We find that most people tend to want a relatively big garden where they can have some outdoor living space, parking, a vegetable patch (and maybe some chickens) and a swimming pool. Gardens like this are, of course, far more manageable than acres and

acres of land, but still require time and money to keep them looking pretty all year round!

What to do though if you have fallen in love with the property of your dreams but it comes with more outdoor space than you were originally planning for? This could be the perfect opportunity to redesign the land and create a wildflower meadow. Relatively low maintenance, excellent for ecosystems, often very pretty during the summer months and likely to harbour a few surprises, a wildflower meadow might just be a wonderful addition to that dream home!

While gardening knowledge is of course important, you will ▶

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€234,960

VAL-D'OIRE-ET-GARTEMPE, HAUTE-VIENNE

A light and spacious four-bedroom, two-bathroom family home with a large open-plan kitchen/diner/living space leading onto a charming south-facing garden with summer seated area. The towns of Montmorillon and Bellac are about 20 minutes away.



€450,000

BESSÉ, CHARENTE

An 18th-century six-bedroom 'logis' with almost two hectares of well-maintained land with two gate accesses situated about five minutes from the historic village of Tusson. There's also a large barn attached to the property with three separate rooms and an attic.



€1,491,000

THIVIERS, DORDOGNE

Surrounded by more than 30 hectares of land, and with uninterrupted views of the countryside and garden from the rear, this stunning 18th/19th-century château with a swimming pool and nine-hole golf course is situated in the lush Périgord Vert.



€240,750

VALDELAUME, DEUX-SÈVRES

Set in a quiet village between three main towns, this four-bedroom stone 'longère' has a pretty garden with terrace areas, flower beds and lawns - all beautifully maintained. There is also a garage, two cellars (one used as a workshop), a car-port and a potting shed.

also need plenty of spare time to dedicate to your garden.

If you work full time, you may not want to spend your precious spare time pruning roses or deadheading flowers. Or, perhaps that is exactly what you'd like to do! Or maybe you are recently retired and in search of new hobbies to keep you busy - even just one acre is a good-sized plot that will keep you occupied.

It's a good idea to write a detailed garden specification, as you would for your house

requirements, with a list of must-haves for your garden. If you already have a clear idea of what you want, you'll be able to envision this when you visit properties for viewings and make appropriate choices with your head rather than your heart. ■

*Jessica Randell works in Beaux Villages' Aubeterre office
Tel: 0800 270 0101 (Freephone from the UK)
0033 (0) 8 05 69 23 23
beauxvillages.com*

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A few key points to keep in mind when considering how much land to buy:

- If you want to buy a property with a lot of land, then make sure you have a valid reason for doing so, such as you have animals, or you are adamant that you don't want any close neighbours.
- Living in a village with the social life this has to offer might mean opting for a smaller garden or maybe a terrace.
- In a house with little or no garden, you are still likely to have beautiful countryside easily accessible where you can walk, cycle picnic or relax.
- Always keep in mind how much spare time you have to dedicate to gardening and how much gardening expertise you have!