Pronunciation: /ˈjɑːrd/  

Forms: OE geard, ME ʒerd(e), ME–15 ʒard(e, yerde, ME–17 ʒarde, ME–18 ʒaird, ME–15 ʒaerd, 15–16 yard, ME–15 ʒaird,

Etymology: Old English geard strong masculine fence, dwelling, house, region = Old Saxon gard enclosure, field, dwelling, Middle Dutch, Dutch gaard garden, Old High German gart circle, ring, Old Norse garðr garth n.¹, (Swedish gård yard, Danish gard yard, farm), Gothic gards house, with corresponding weak forms Old Frisian garda garden, Old Saxon garðo, Old High German garto (Middle High German garte, German garten) garden, Gothic garda enclosure, stall. (Old English geard is the second element of middangeard MIDDENERD n., ortgeard ORCHARD n., wíngeard WINYARD n.)

The ulterior relations of these words are uncertain. Close affinity of sense is exhibited by the words derived from the Germanic root gerd- : gerd- : gurd- , represented by gird v. (Old English gyrdan, Old High German gerten, Old Norse gyrða) and girth n.¹ (Old Norse gjóðr, Gothic gairda), and those derived from an Indo-European root ghort-, viz. Greek χόρτος farm-yard, feeding-place, food, fodder, Latin hortus garden, co-hors enclosure, yard, pen for cattle and poultry, cohort n., court n.¹, Old Irish gort cornfield; but there are phonological difficulties in the way of equating both groups of words. (Old Church Slavonic gradŭ enclosure, town, Russian grad, gorod town, as in Petrograd, Novgorod, Lithuanian gârdas hurdle, fold, are probably borrowed < Germanic.)

The general signification of the word is ‘enclosure’, the particular character of which is usually to be inferred from the context; the simple word is thus often felt to be short for a specific compound of it (see references in the various senses).

1.

a. A comparatively small uncultivated area attached to a house or other building or enclosed by it; esp. such an area surrounded by walls or buildings within the precincts of a house, castle, inn, etc. Cf. BACK YARD n., castle yard, chapel-yard n., COURT-YARD n., inn-yard, palace yard, stable-yard.

In Old English used in sing. and pl. = dwelling, house, home, the ‘courts of heaven’; also, region, tract (cf. middangeard MIDDENERD n.).

OE Guthlac A 791 Swa sódfræstra sawla motun in ecne geard up gestigan rodera rice.
OE Beowulf 2459 Nis þær hearpan sweg, gomen in geardum.
OE Genesis 740 Wit.þorlet on heofonrice heahgetimbro, godlice geardas.
c1400 St. Alexius (Laud 108) 302 Alex..Is dweld in his fader ʒerd As a pore man.
c1480 (†a1400) St. Mary of Egypt 571 in W. M. Metcalfe Legends Saints Sc. Dial. (1896) I. 312
To þe tempil men cane draw; & of It til in þe þarde I wes cummyne, I ne spard.


1562 J. H. EYWOOD *Prov. & Epigr.* (1867) 100, I kepe doggis..in my yarde.

1565 in D. H. Fleming *Reformation in Scotl.* (1910) 613 Part of ane yard within the abbay place of Sanctandrois.

1657 J. BALFOUR *Hist. Wks.* (1825) II. 71 He was brought vpone a scaffold in the parliament yaird.

1711 J. ADDISON *Spectator* No. 121. ¶1 As I was walking..in the great Yard that belongs to my Friend's Country House.

1720 W. SEWEL *Hist. Quakers* (1795) I. ii. 96 The steeple-house yard.

1817 SCOTT *Rob Roy* II. xii. 242, I wandered from one quadrangle of old-fashioned buildings to another, and from thence to the College-yards, or walking-ground.

1838 E. BULWER-LYTTON *Alice* II. v. iv. 135 Four horses, that had been only fourteen miles, had just re-entered the yard.

1842 DICKENS *Amer. Notes* I. v. 183 An old cathedral yard.

1842 DICKENS *Amer. Notes* I. viii. 279 A long row of small houses fronting on the street, and opening at the back upon a common yard.

1908 E. FOWLER *Between Trent & Ancholme* 20 The small yard between the stables.

**b. spec.** †(a) The ‘ground’ of a playhouse, orig. an inn-yard; (b) Sc. *pl. a school playground; (c) = COURT n.* 3 (esp. in proper names, as *Carter’s Yard, Thompson’s Yard* in Oxford).

1609 T. DEKKER *Guls Horne-bk.* sig. E3, Neither are you to be hunted from thence though the Scar-crowes in the yard, hoot at you.

1808 SCOTT *Autobiogr.* in J. G. Lockhart *Mem. Life Scott* (1839) I. 41, I made a brighter figure in the yards than in the class.

1815 SCOTT *Guy Mannering* I. ii. 27 Half the youthful mob ‘of the yards’ used to assemble..to see Dominie Sampson..descend the stairs from the Greek class.

1851 H. MAYHEW *London Labour* II. 211/1 Every Street, Lane, Square, Yard, Court, Alley, Passage, and Place..are to be thus cleansed.

**c. Contextually = CHURCHYARD n., GRAVEYARD n.**

[1617 F. MORISON *Itinerary* I. 145 Not farre thence is a yard vsed for common buriall, called the holy field, vulgarly *Campo Santo.*]

1792 R. BURNS in J. Johnson *Scots Musical Museum* IV. 326 And now I greet round their green beds in the yard.

1836 HOOTON *Bilberry Thurland* I. xi. 217 The road he had taken brought him at length to the church, through the yard of which it led.
d. An enclosure attached to a prison, in which the prisoners take exercise. *liberty of the yard* (U.S.): see quot. 1828–32.

1777 J. Howard *State Prisons Eng. & Wales* iii. 74 Why were not the walls of the yards repaired in time, that prisoners might with safety be allowed the proper use of them?

1828–32 Webster *Amer. Dict. Eng. Lang.* at Yard, *Liberty of the yard*, is a liberty granted to persons imprisoned for debt, of walking in the yard, or within any other limits prescribed by law.

1861 H. Mayhew *London Labour* (new ed.) III. 438/1 This person...took me into the yard and stripped me.

e. *the Yard*, short for ‘Scotland Yard’, the chief London police office.

1888 A. C. Gunter *Mr. Potter* xviii. 221 They're tired of paying your old master's salary up at the Yard.

1904 J. Sweeney *At Scotland Yard* ii, W. E. Monro..was one of the greatest public servants who ever worked at the Yard.

f. U.S. A college campus or the area enclosed by its main buildings; spec. at Harvard: *the Yard*, the quadrangle formed by the original college buildings.


1841 *Harvard Faculty Orders & Regul.* 6 Collecting in groups round the doors of the College buildings or in the yard [shall be considered a violation of decorum].

1871 L. H. Bagg *Four Years at Yale* 27 Besides the fourteen buildings already described, the only others within the yard..were the two wooden dwelling-houses.

1902 *Boston Evening Record* 18 Mar. 8/4 (*heading*) Out of the 'Yard'—how the Harvard students have gone to the 'Gold Coast'.

1942 L. V. Berrey & M. Van Den Bark *Amer. Thes. Slang* §829.12 Campus, camp, orchard,..yard.

1970 *E. Queen' Last Woman* III. 163, I found out the truth about myself in my freshman year at Harvard... There was an episode in a bar, well away from the Yard.

2. An enclosure forming a pen for cattle or poultry, a storing place for hay, or the like, belonging to a farm-house or surrounded by farm-buildings, or one in which a barn or similar building stands. (Cf. barn-yard n. at BARN n. Compounds 2, FARM-YARD n. and adj., poultry-yard.)

- c1300 Havelok (Laud) (1868) 702 Be hennes of þe yerd.
- c1386 CHAUCER Nun's Priest's Tale 27 A yeerd she hadde enclosed al aboute With stikkes and a drye dych with-oute In which she hadde a Cok.
- c1386 CHAUCER Nun's Priest's Tale 177 Oon of hem was logged in a stalle Fer in a yeerd with Oxen of the plough.
- 1481 CAXTON tr. Hist. Reynard Fox (1970) 11, I [sc. chantecler] had viij fayr sones and seuen fayr doUGHTERS which..wente in a yerde which was walled round a boute.
- 1551 in J. W. Clay North Country Wills (1908) I. (Surtees 1908) 218 To Jhon Collin,..one lode of heye in my yarde.
- 1573 T. TUSser Fiue Hundreth Points Good Husbandry (new ed.) f. 23v, All maner of straw, that is scattred in yard.
- 1646 SIR T. BROWNE Pseudodoxia Epidemica III. xxv. 175 One of the Lyons leaped downe into a neighbours yard, where nothing regarding the crowing or noise of the Cocks, hee eat them up.
- 1749 H. FIELDING Tom Jones II. iv. viii. 51 A vast Herd of Cows in a rich Farmer's Yard.
- 1841 DICKENS Old Curiosity Shop I. xv. 173 A thriving farm with sleepy cows lying about the yard.

3. A piece of enclosed ground of moderate size, often adjoining a house and covered with grass or planted with trees; a garden. Now chiefly N. Amer. and dial., a kitchen or cottage-garden (cf. DOOR-YARD n., kail-yard at KALE-YARD n.).

   See also grass-yard n. at GRASS n.' Compounds 2, GREEN YARD n.

- a1300 Cursor Mundi 1027 Paradis..es a yard cald o delites Wit all maner of suet spices.
- 1390 J. Gower Confessio Amantis II. 30 And after Phillis Philliberd This tre was cleped in the yerd.
- a1400 (a1325) Cursor Mundi (Vesp.) l. 12522 He sent him to þe yerd..For to gedir þam sum cale.
- c1400 Sc. Trojan War (Horstm.) l. 255 3ardes for herbys ande for virgerys.
- c1440 Gesta Romanorum (Add. MS.) xxvii. 11 He had a faire yerde [Harl. MS. gardin], that he mekell loved.
- c1440 Promptorium Parvulorum 537/2 3erd, or 3orde.., ortus.
yard, n.1 : Oxford English Dictionary

1477 in Exch. Rolls Scot. IX. 101 (note), Oure landis of Auld Lindoris with the brewlandis cogaiis and yairdis therof.


1718 in Nairme Peerage Evid. (1874) 33 Houses biggins yairds orchyairds.


1818 Scott Heart of Mid-Lothian viii, in Tales of my Landlord 2nd Ser. I. 236 Any of her apple-trees or cabbages which she had left rooted in the ‘yard’ at Woodend.

a1825 R. Forby Vocab. E. Anglia (1830) Yard, the garden belonging to a cottage or ordinary messuage.

1835 J. H. Ingraham South-West II. xxxii. 88 Striped grass, cultivated in yards at the north.

1877 H. G. Murray Tom Kittle’s Wake 21 My daughter, Molly tief pass, maam, den go da him yard.

1889 M. E. Wilkins Far-away Melody (1891) 11 Four..old apple-trees, which stood promiscuously about the yard back of the Cottage.

1907 W. Jekyll Jamaican Song & Story 163 The immediate surroundings of the house are called the yard. They seldom speak of going to his yard. They say they are going to his yard.

1932 ‘L. G. Gibbon’ Sunset Song ii. 97 The berries hung ripe in the yard of the gardener Galt.

1947 J. A. Lomax Adventures Ballad Hunter vii. 185 She says, ‘Can you cut yards?’ an’ I says, ‘Yes ma’am.’ She says, ‘Go roun,..to de back.., you’ll find a lawn-mower there, and then begin cuttin’.’

1956 G. E. Evans Ask Fellows who cut Hay iv. 55 The village was almost entirely self-supporting, most families living on what they grew or reared on their yards or allotments.

1980 W. Maxwell So Long, see you Tomorrow (1981) ii. 22 The rented house had no yard to speak of.

4.

a. An enclosure set apart for the growing, rearing, breeding, or storing of something or the carrying on of some work or business. Cf. brickyard n. at brick n. Compounds 3, DOCKYARD n., dung-yard, hemp-yard, ORCHARD n. (Old English ortgeard), SHIPYARD n., tan-yard, VINEYARD n., † winyard (Old English wingeard).

1378 Durham MS. Cell. Roll In plumbo empto pro uno aqueducto in le Hempyard.

1520 Perth Hammermen Bk. (1889) 15 Ressavit fra John Kynloch of this yeres excrestes of the yairds.

1523 LD. Berners tr. J. Froissart Cronycles I. xvi. 7/2 Great leuers..the whiche they founde in a carpenters yarde.
Before the said Boate..bee lanched out of the Yarde or
Grounde wherin the same Boate..shall fortune to bee made.

He hath a little yard, gravelled fit for wrestling.

The porter, master-caulker and ‘teamer’ of Deptford Yard.

A ship-carpenter in the yard at Portsmouth.

The yard is paid quarterly.

What can be more amusing than Searle’s yard on a fine Sunday morning.

‘Something in the yard [sc. the Dockyard],’ replied the stranger.

Eggs from the Yards of Mr. Punchard.

The ‘yards’..are usually situated near the head station.

This yard retains the water filling the basin.

The piece of ground adjacent to a railway station or terminus, used for making up trains, storing rolling-stock, etc.; also an enclosure in which cabs, trams, etc. are kept when not in use.

A waggon set out for London from the general waggon-yard..every day.

A..young man..emerging suddenly from the coach-yard.

Yesterday his cabs were still in the yard.

The yard foreman knows the capacity of each of the engines he sends out from his yard.

the Yards, the stockyards where cattle are collected for slaughter, esp. in Chicago. U.S.

The average weekly expenditure by butchers at the New York yards during the year 1863 was $328,865.

Already the yards were full of activity.

As in Chicago, the pride of Omaha is the Stockyards... I was looking straight down into the Yards.

I’ve been called all kinds of things ever since I was a kid back of the Yards.
5. **U.S. and Canada.** An area in which moose and deer congregate, esp. during the winter months.

1829  T. C. HALIBURTON *Hist. & Statist. Acct. Nova Scotia* II. ix. 392  In winter they [sc. moose] form herds, and when the snow is deep, they describe a circle, and press the snow with their feet, until it becomes hard, which is called by hunters a yard, or pen.

1864–5  J. G. WOOD *Homes without Hands* 614  So confident is the Elk in the security of the 'yard', that it can scarcely ever be induced to leave its snowy fortification.

1884  *Science* 28 Mar. 394/1  Immense yards, containing hundreds of deer, existed along the various tributaries [of the Ottawa].

1903  *Longman's Mag.* July 248  [They] never failed to destroy a 'yard' to the last fawn.

**COMPOUNDS**

 atrib. and Comb. (a) in sense 1, as **yard-broom, yard door, yard gate, yard wall; yard-dog** *n.* a watchdog kept in the yard of a house or dwelling.  (b) in sense 2, as **yard-bar, yard-dung, yard-liquor, yard-pond, yard-room; †(c) in sense 3 (Sc. and U.S.), as yard door, yard end, yard house, yard tack; yard-boy** *n.* a general labourer; a gardener or gardener's boy (*obs.* exc. Caribbean).† **yard-dike** *n.* *Obs.* a garden wall.  **yard-grass** *n.* a low annual grass, *Eleusine indica*, common in 'yards' about houses in parts of U.S.A.; also *Cynodon Dactylon*.  **yard sale** *n.* U.S. a sale of miscellaneous second-hand items held in the garden of a private house.  (d) in sense 4a, 4b, esp. relating to dockyards, ship-yards, cab yards, or railway yards, as **yard clerk, yard craft, yard-keeper, yard-lighter, yard-master; yard-money** *n.* fees payable by hirers of cabs from cab-owners to stablemen, etc. on returning them to the yard.

(a)  
1580  in *Archaeologia* 64 358  To mak and hang a yard dor at the nether end of the turrit at the bridg.

1795  J. HAIGHTON in *Philos. Trans. (Royal Soc.)* 85 197,  I kept this animal nineteen months, during the greatest part of which he performed the office of a yard dog.

1823  SCOTT *Quentin Durward* I. Introd. p. vii,  Trusty, the yard-dog.

1857  C. KINGSLEY *Two Years Ago* I. iii. 69  Lofty garden and yard walls of grey stone.

1865  C. KINGSLEY *Hereward* xix,  Let me and my serving-man go free out of thy yard gate.
1905  A. C. BENSON *Thread of Gold* ii,  A big black yard-dog.
1908  E. FOWLER *Between Trent & Ancholme* 29  Near the yard doors.
1921  *Blackwood's Mag.*  Feb. 195/1  Dip an old yard-broom in a bucket of water.
1982  J. SCOTT *Local Lads* iii. 32  Billy took up an aged, patchily moulted yardbroom.

(b)
1580  T. TUSSER *Fiue Hundred Pointes Good Husbandrie* (new ed.) f. 49v,  Some barnroome haue little, & yardeome as much.
1744  W. ELLIS *Mod. Husbandman* Jan. xi. 81  He may now carry out his Stable or Yard-Dung.
1764  *Museum Rusticum* II. i. 3  When I make use of yard dung, I take care it is very rotten.
1778  W. MARSHALL *Minutes Agric.* Digest 23  It is better management to prevent, than either to waste or cart-out a superfluity of Yard-liquor.

(c)
1473  in C. Rogers *Rental Bk. Cupar-Angus* (1879) I. 189  He sal put bath husband tak and ȝard tak til al possibil polyci.
1505  *Rental Bk. Cupar-Angus* (1879) I. 260  Biggind of gud ȝerd hous, sufficiand chawmeris and stabulis to resaue and herbry...xij or xvj hors.
1532  *Abst. Protocols Town Clerks Glasgow* (1897) IV. 57  The rademyng and lowsing of twa riggis of land, lyand at his yard end.
1691  *Burgh of Jedburgh Council Rec.* 19 Mar.  ((Scottish Borders Archives: BJ/1/4))  Ffor his wrongous..away takeing of certaine stones out of the ministers yearth dyke at his awin hand.
1788  J. WOODFORDE *Diary* 7 Jan. (1927) III. 2  To my Yard Boy, Charles Crossley, for 3 Quarters of a Years Wages pd 0. 15. 9.
1809  A. HENRY *Trav. & Adventures Canada* 79  Behind the yard-door of my own house,.there was a low fence.
1822  J. WOODS *Two Years' Resid. Eng. Prairie* 199  Yard-grass comes on land that has been much trodden; it is something like cock's-foot-grass, except the seed.
1831  C. FARQUHARSON *Jrnl.* 2 Dec. in *Relic of Slavery* (1957) 47  Employed all hands weeding..along with the yard boys.
1907  A. LANG *Hist. Scotl.* IV. xvi. 392  A minister's yard dyke, or garden wall, was overthrown.
1958  S. SELVON *Turn again Tiger* viii. 185,  I take the worst job that was going—as a kind of yard-boy by the white people house.
1975  *New Rev.* May 10/2  In and around Port of Spain cooks, ironers and yardboys in attendance.
1976  *Flint* (Mich.) *Jrnl.* 12 July c–5  Yard sale—1508 Webber canning jars, screen tent, patterns, books, [etc.].
1982  M. McMULLEN *Until Death do us Part* (1983) vii. 46  There was a yard sale down our street.
DRAFT ADDITIONS  1993

W. Indies. Also yaad. A dwelling or house (including the land attached); also, a property composed of many rented dwelling units consisting of independent structures with shared toilet facilities (a tenant yard) or forming part of multi-family buildings (typical of a government yard); hence amongst expatriate Jamaicans: Jamaica, ‘home’.


1907  W. Jekyll. Jamaican Song & Story lvii. 163  The immediate surroundings of the house are called the yard. They seldom speak of going to a friend’s house. They say they are going to his yard.


1974  New York 4 Nov. 73/1  Alton has been on the hit parade down in Yard..ever since his first
smash in 1959.

1976  J. BERRY  Bluefoot Traveller (1977) 27  No mood can touch one Mango season back at Yard.

1988  Washington Post 4 Sept. (Book World section) x14/4  The Pamela Mordecai anthology of Jamaican poetry since independence is titled From Our Yard., but 11 of the 28 poets live somewhere else.