

GLORIOUS GARDENS TO VISIT NOW

Philosopher Francis Bacon once called a visit to a garden 'the purest of human pleasures'. Here's our pick of venues in Britain and beyond that are sure to inspire you to get green at home



OPEN GARDEN SQUARES WEEKEND, LONDON

Over 200 London gardens, most of them private, will open their gates to the public for two days in June. And it's not just garden squares – there are rooftop terraces, plots cultivated on the tops of canal boats, indoor flower installations and pop-up orchards, many tucked away behind some of the capital's busiest streets. Make a beeline for tours of the River Cafe's kitchen garden and the newly restored courtyard behind Rococo Chocolates' Belgravia headquarters, which is filled with the scent of Moroccan kaffir-lime and jasmine. 18–19 June, tickets £14 (tickets include access to all participating gardens; opensquares.org)

NATIONAL GARDEN SCHEME OPEN DAYS, NATIONWIDE

Visiting charming private gardens for a small admission fee (especially when the proceeds go to charities like Macmillan) is a perfect exchange. Small gardens sure to inspire urbanites include four neighbouring plots in Islington (5 June, £8). Further north, the owners of Jackson's Wold in North Yorkshire will show groups round the romantic, informal cottage garden starring a wildflower meadow and Victorian greenhouse (22 May and 26 June, £3). The scheme's Festival Weekend will see 407 homes across the country reveal their secrets (4–5 June; ngs.org.uk).



HOUSEPLANTS A POTTED HISTORY

1500s

The Tudors use potpourri to evoke the sweet smell of roses indoors and, inspired by theories of garden design in Renaissance Italy, the size and splendour of a home's garden becomes a signifier of social status.



1600s

Plants such as nasturtiums and sunflowers are shipped from the New World to Europe and gifted to monarchs – who soon realised that delicate flowers demand conditions similar to their native climes.



1700s

Orangeries – elegant single-storey edifices defined by a south-facing wall of windows (such as Kew Gardens', opened in 1761) are built by wealthy landowners to house citrus trees from the Mediterranean.



1800s

The trend for florals in fashion prompts a Victorian enthusiasm for houseplants. Fumes from coal fires meant that only the toughest of shrubs could survive, such as Aspidistra, known at the time as 'the cast-iron plant'.



EARLY 1900s

The decorative potted fronds that frame Edwardian hotels' palm courts (which were designed to screen the orchestra from afternoon-tea-goers without affecting the sound) make their way into fashionable homes.



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VILLA DELLA PERGOLA, LIGURIA, ITALY

We will be re-tracing the footsteps of Victorian aristocrats this summer and making a pilgrimage to the beautiful Italian Riviera town Alassio, where Villa Della Pergola is now open for its summer season until 31 October. Designed by British owners and restored by a local Italian collective, the garden embodies a harmonious mix of the modern, tropical and dramatic (it was used as the backdrop for Hitchcock's film *The Pleasure Garden*). Spring is the Wisteria pergola's moment, but June and July see the extraordinary 350-variety agapanthus collection paint the estate purple (double rooms from £250 per night; villadellapergola.com).



ABBEY GARDENS, TRESCO, ISLES OF SCILLY

This sub-tropical garden on the micro-climate of Tresco, one of the Isles of Scilly, is reached by taking the train to Penzance in Cornwall and the petite 'Skybus' plane to the archipelago's largest island, St Mary's. Terraces house towering Mexican agaves, palm trees from the Canary Islands and South African proteas, Britain's largest variety of fuchsia (tresco.co.uk).

SEZINCOTE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

This architectural and horticultural treasure, completed in 1807, is an ode to India. The house is best described as 'Neo-Mughal' – think the Taj Mahal reimagined by Georgian England – and overlooks a lush Rajasthani-style garden. Laid out by landscaping legend Humphrey Repton, the water garden evokes the humid Himalayan pine forests, especially during British summer rainstorms. Picnic in the atmospheric Persian garden, which is populated by yew trees and surrounded by Hindu-style pavilions, stone elephants and a spouting snake fountain, and then stop for afternoon (chai) tea in the Orangery (sezincote.co.uk).



HOUSEPLANTS A POTTED HISTORY

1970s

Sturdy statement shrubs become a signature part of interior decor: *Sansevieria* (known as 'Mother-in-Law's Tongue') enjoys a reputation for being marvellously indestructible.



1980s

From being a bloom for the specialist grower only, the orchid goes mainstream. Rumours of the spider plant's ability to purify air are confirmed by a scientific study, which sees them arrive in offices throughout the UK.



1990/2000s

Windowsill herb pots surge in popularity across the country, fuelled by the rise in apartment living and trend for growing your own. Avant-garde gardeners also start to keep potted lemon or olive trees indoors.



2015

Stylish design stores begin decorating Japanese sprouting mud-balls (*kokedamas*), and a trend for terrariums arrives – glass bowls acting as microclimates for artfully arranged moss, succulents and cacti.



2016

Supersized plants and small exotic trees are the greenery of the moment. Thomas Broom, head gardener at Petersham Nurseries, cites the Virginia Blue Fern (*Phlebodium Pseudoaureum*) as his plant pick for this year.

