

# British Castles

July 2025



Castles With Gorgeous Gardens

Remarkable buildings in  
beautiful landscapes





# EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear all,

Welcome to the July edition of 'British Castles' magazine.

Most castles are a dramatic presence in the landscape, simply by virtue of their sheer size and stature. But many have put their defensive function far behind them and built on their role as a country home, creating extraordinary gardens in the grounds that surround them. That's the theme of this month's issue, and we start with a tour of just five of Britain's best-known castle gardens.

Our picture quiz is another challenging one, while this month's gallery features views of the gardens you'll find in this issue, as well as some that have appeared in previous editions of the magazine.

Powis Castle is the subject of our second feature this month. It's a massive landmark, dominating the surrounding Welsh landscape, and its breathtaking gardens attract visitors from around the world.

And July's lesser-known British castle is Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex. This moated masterpiece deserves to be better known, if only for its wonderful setting and must-visit gardens.

Enjoy the magazine!

Chris





# FIVE CASTLES WITH INCREDIBLE GARDENS

It's hard to imagine two pursuits more radically different from each other than warfare and horticulture. So it's perhaps strange that so many British castles – with their often bloody history – are the sites of such beautiful gardens. From romantic walled gardens to grand Italianate terraces, many of the country's finest castles boast gardens as impressive as their turrets and towers.

There are some dazzling castle gardens to explore – too many to cover in detail – so in this guide, we explore just five of Britain's best-known castles – each surrounded by the most wonderful landscaping.





## SISSINGHURST CASTLE

Sissinghurst Castle in Kent is world-famous for its romantically designed garden rooms. Once an Elizabethan brick manor that fell into ruin, the estate was rescued in 1930 by writer Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson, who spent three decades creating its celebrated gardens. Their design includes the iconic White Garden (ablaze with white flowers) and lush rose-bordered walks. Over 200 varieties of old roses and countless perennials were planted under Vita's care, and the result is

an internationally respected plant collection. In summer the borders burst with colour (delphiniums, foxgloves and extraordinary blue poppies among them), while spring brings carpets of bulbs and fragrant climbing vines on the castle tower. Visitors today explore winding paths shaded by yews, climb the castle turret for panoramic views, or relax on benches among swathes of roses and geraniums.

## POWIS CASTLE

Standing grandly above Welshpool in the east of Wales, Powis Castle is known for dramatic Italianate

terraces that descend in broad steps from the house to its formal grounds. Built by a Welsh prince in the 13th century, the castle later became home to the Herbert family and was transformed in the 17th–18th centuries into one of Britain's few surviving Baroque gardens. Today the site is a National Trust property and you can read much more about Powis in our article on page XX.

## GLAMIS CASTLE

Glamis Castle in Angus, Scotland was the childhood home of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother – grandmother to the current King. The 17th-century building, on a sprawling 14,000-acre estate, is surrounded by varied gardens and woodlands that flourish through the seasons. The approach in spring is striking: long drives are lined with thousands of daffodils and snowdrops peeping among ancient oaks. Among the castle's four walled gardens, the formal Italian Garden stands out. A sheltered pergola walkway and clipped hedges stand before a backdrop of mature conifers in the arboretum. In summer this stone-walled garden is lush with climbing roses and highly perfumed herbaceous bedding, while a nearby





Glamis Castle

Walled Garden blooms with mixed borders and hidden benches. A 17th-century sundial – 21 ft high – dominates the castle’s forecourt. Winding trails lead from the Italian Garden past a princess’s memorial and through woodlands. Spread a picnic blanket on the lawn or listen to the creek in the woodland gardens.

## HEVER CASTLE

Built in the 13th century and famed as Anne Boleyn’s childhood home, Hever Castle’s gardens received an extravagant makeover in the early 20th century under American magnate William Waldorf Astor. His ambitious scheme married Tudor ambience with formal grandeur.



Hever Castle





Arundel Castle

Visitors enter through the Astor Pavilion into a long Italian Garden – a pergola-lined cloister flanked by terraced flowerbeds and a Pompeian wall walk some 220 yards long. There are broad lawns and a 35-acre Moat Garden surrounded by yews and deciduous trees, reflecting the castle and the Temple of Love fountain. A Walled Rose Garden ablaze in summer with giant climbers roses. Astor's whimsical touches include a water maze on the Lake, and shaded woodland paths bursting with bluebells in spring. The pergola offers dappled shade for strolling amid fuchsias, hostas and clematis climbing its pillars. Spring brings bedding tulips and azaleas, summer

sees lilies and roses at their peak, and autumn colours blaze in the Oaks Wood..

## ARUNDEL CASTLE

From its vantage point above the River Arun, Arundel Castle – home to the Dukes of Norfolk, despite being in Sussex – has been surrounded by changing gardens for nearly a millennium. Its current 38-acre landscape was largely created by the modern Norfolks. The showpiece is the Collector Earl's Garden, opened in 2008. Here broad terraces cascade with arching water rills and oak-columned pergolas, and even an exotic glasshouse pavilion nicknamed housing tropical palms and orchids.

On either side of the terraces are lush pastel-coloured herbaceous borders leading through to a walled rose garden: its gothic-arched pergola is trained with dozens of roses that perfume the air in summer. A nearby White Garden offers serene planting of pale perennials for springtime peace. Arrive in spring to enjoy thousands of tulips planted along the walls during Arundel's annual Tulip Festival and the scent of English roses from the rose garden. In summer the terraces sparkle with fountains and fragrance, and long vistas of green give way to views of Arun Valley. The new medieval-style stumpery and restored fishponds add playful touches to strolls through woodland areas.



# QUIZ: CASTLES WITH GARDENS

A tough test for you this month! See if you can match the castle with its photo. All are castles known for their incredible setting or landscaping! Answers on page 24.

Beaumaris Castle

Crathes Castle

Powis Castle

Belvoir Castle

Dunrobin Castle

Sissinghurst Castle

Bodiam Castle

Edinburgh Castle

Warwick Castle

Caerlaverock Castle

Guildford Castle

Windsor Castle

Castle Howard

Ludlow Castle









Powis Castle

GALLERY:  
CASTLES WITH  
INCREDIBLE  
GARDENS





Hever Castle



# Sissinghurst Castle gardens







Arundel Castle





The sundial at Glamis Castle





Sudeley Castle's Knot Garden





Belvoir Castle Gardens





# POWIS CASTLE

## A WELSH MASTERPIECE

From a commanding position above the Severn Valley in mid-Wales, Powis Castle is more than a medieval stronghold turned stately home. Centuries of landscaping, careful planting, bold design, and artistic flair have carved something of a masterpiece into the hillsides. With its steep terraces, surreal clipped yews, and seasonal sweeps of colour, the gardens at Powis are among the most dramatic in Britain – and for many visitors, they're the real reason to come.

### FROM CONFLICT TO CONTENTMENT

Powis Castle began life in the late 13th century as a fortress for the Welsh prince Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, at a time when borders were fluid and allegiances tested. Over time, it passed to the Herbert family, who transformed the rugged red sandstone castle into a grand Elizabethan and later Baroque residence. Its battlements still command the surrounding countryside, but the view from within the grounds is softer – sculpted, cultivated, and European.







Grand castle turrets



The major transformation came in the 17th and 18th centuries, when successive generations of Herberts developed the gardens into a tiered vision inspired by the grand gardens of Renaissance Italy and France. Remarkably, the layout survived both the rise of the English landscape movement and two world wars – and today, the National Trust maintains it with a combination of historic preservation and modern horticulture.

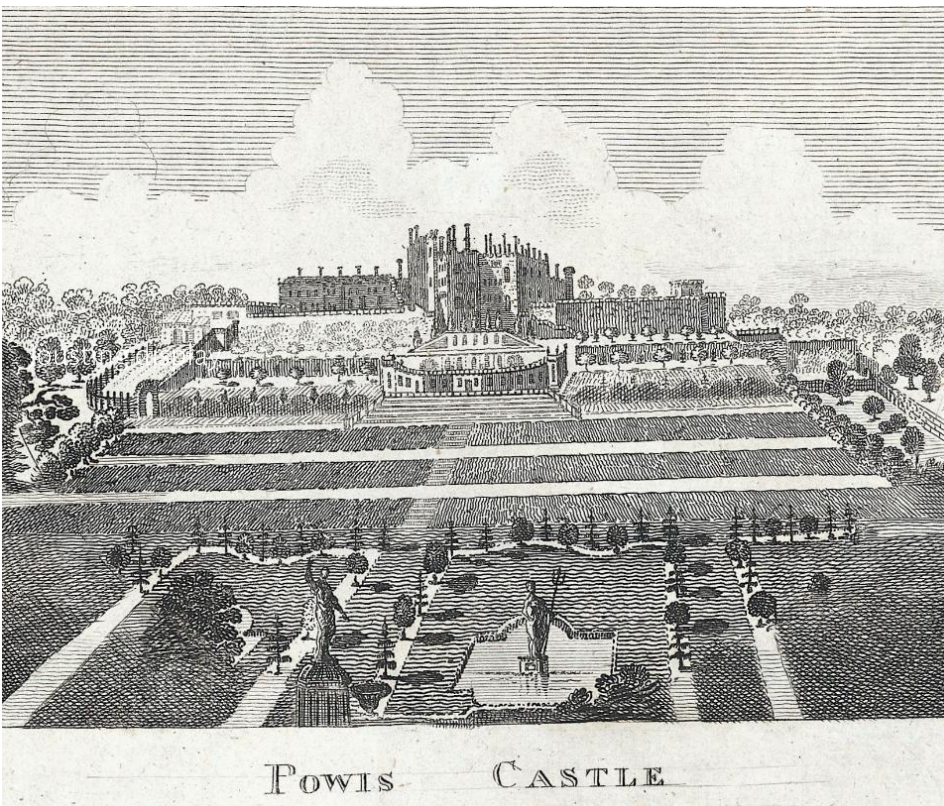
## TERRACES AND VISTAS

The gardens of Powis are set out in dramatic stages across a steep hillside that drops away from the castle's southern face. These six broad terraces – each with its own planting scheme, atmosphere, and elevation – create a green amphitheatre with the castle at its peak.

The Top Terrace, once reserved for private walks and



Ornate terraces



contemplation, offers sweeping views of the parkland and beyond. Gravel paths wind between low stone walls and lavender-edged beds. Further down, the Italian Terrace is home to formal borders and statuary – many brought back from the Grand Tour – as well as huge urns and carved balustrades that frame the long views.

Most striking feature of all are the clipped yews that ramble down the slopes in a series of strange green forms. Some are over 300 years old and have been sculpted into tumbling clouds, mushrooms, and toppling columns. Their shapes change subtly





over the decades – always pruned by hand – and form a living sculpture gallery that softens the architecture while giving the garden a fantastical quality.

## COLOUR, STRUCTURE, AND SURPRISE

Beyond the bold geometry of the terraces, the gardens burst into colour with seasonal planting schemes. In spring, daffodils, tulips and magnolias light up the upper paths, while cherry blossoms flutter over the Orangery. By June, the herbaceous borders of the lower terraces are ablaze with alliums,

peonies, geraniums, and irises. Summer brings white lilies, cannas, and old-fashioned roses that spill over dry-stone walls and arch over doorways.

In the formal Lower Garden, paths lead through richly planted borders flanked by lush hedging and filled with a rotating palette of seasonal favourites – from purple salvias and golden rudbeckias to sky-blue agapanthus. Further on lies the Orangery Garden, where Mediterranean scents mingle with the sound of water trickling from ornate fountains.

In Autumn the terraces catch the low golden light, and, even in winter, the strong structure of the terraces, evergreens, and topiary give the garden backbone, while frost and fog lend it a haunting charm.

## A CASTLE OF CURIOSITIES

Though the gardens are the highlight, the castle is a huge draw in its own right, with centuries of art and collections. The Clive Museum – named for Robert Clive of India and his son Edward – houses a remarkable collection of South Asian artefacts,





Down the terraces towards the yew hedge

remnants of the colonial era that helped fund many grand British estates.

Dark-panelled rooms, hung with tapestries and filled with portraits, feel like a step into another world, a mile away from the bright, grand terraces.

## VISITING TODAY

Managed by the National Trust, Powis Castle and Gardens is open year-round, with

extended hours and events during peak seasons. Guided tours of the castle are available, but many visitors prefer to lose themselves in the gardens, and walkers can also explore the wider deer park and woodlands surrounding the estate.





# LESSER KNOWN BRITISH CASTLES

## HERSTMONCEUX CASTLE AND GARDENS

To see the showstopping Herstmonceux Castle for the first time, it's hard to believe that it's not better known as one of Britain's great landmarks. In the gentle folds of the East Sussex Weald, it's certainly one of Britain's most picturesque moated castles. Built in the 15th century by Sir Roger Fiennes after he secured a licence to crenellate, it was among the first great buildings in England to be made of brick—a material

that would have seemed strikingly modern at the time. Though conceived more as a grand manor house than a military fortress, its turrets, battlements and wide moat lend it an undeniable fairytale charm.

After falling into disrepair by the 18th century, the castle was rescued and restored in the early 20th century, first by





Colonel Claude Lowther and then by Sir Paul Latham. In the mid-20th century, it became home to the Royal Greenwich Observatory. Today, the castle is part of Bader College, operated by Queen's University, Canada, and while its interiors are only accessible by guided tour, the gardens and grounds offer ample opportunity to explore.

## A GARDEN JOURNEY

The estate spans more than 300 acres of formal gardens, wildflower meadows, woodlands and lakes. At the heart of it lies the Elizabethan Garden – originally

a croquet lawn – now enclosed by yew hedges and filled with lavender, old English roses and herbaceous borders that burst into colour in summer. A sundial and a bust of Sir John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal, serve as focal points and nods to the estate's scientific past.

The themed walled gardens add layers of interest for returning visitors. The Shakespeare Garden features plants mentioned in the playwright's works, many labelled with the Bard's quotations, while the Apothecary





Garden brings together traditional medicinal herbs with a sensory experience. The Magic Garden, with oversized mushroom-shaped seats and playful planting is especially popular with younger guests.

## MEADOWS, FOLLY AND FOREST

Outside of the formal borders, the estate opens up into wide, flower-filled meadows that reach their peak in high summer. In July and August, the meadows are a riot of colour with orchids, yarrow, and oxeye daisies – all managed with low-impact techniques that promote biodiversity.

A secluded folly tucked beyond the meadows offers a romantic corner – part rose garden, part wilderness. Paths lead into the surrounding woodlands, where avenues of chestnut trees provide dappled shade. Sculptures and natural play structures are dotted throughout, including a hand-crafted rope maze.

## A RICH AND VARIED PAST

Although Herstmonceux has never witnessed a siege or battle, its design is clearly defensive. The moat reflects red-brick walls and towers that belie its domestic origins, while the gardens





around it tell a more peaceful story of continuity and care. During its time as the Royal Greenwich Observatory, the grounds housed scientific instruments and telescopes, many of which have now been removed or repurposed.

Today, the estate balances historic integrity with modern conservation. The formal gardens reflect Renaissance and Elizabethan styles, while the wider grounds offer a haven for wildlife and opportunities for walkers.

## A GARDEN FOR ALL SEASONS

In spring, the woods turn blue with bluebells and the formal beds start to fill with colour. Summer sees herbaceous borders at their peak, the rose garden heavy

with scent, and meadows alive with bees and butterflies. By autumn, the chestnut avenues turn amber and gold. Even in winter, the eerie structure of the yew hedges and bare-branched trees, combined with the castle's reflection in the moat, give the landscape a gothic charm.

Opening times vary throughout the year, so it's worth checking in advance if you're considering a visit as the castle plays host to all sorts of events, from falconry displays to historic talks, but if you're a fan of the great British country estate, it's well worth the trip for the gardens alone.

**Quiz Answers;** 1. Crathes Castle; 2. Windsor Castle; 3. Castle Howard; 4. Powis Castle; 5. Ludlow Castle; 6. Beaumaris Castle; 7. Warwick Castle; 8. Guildford Castle; 9. Sissinghurst Castle; 10. Dunrobin Castle; 11. Edinburgh Castle; 12. Bodiam Castle; 13. Caerlaverock Castle; 14. Belvoir Castle





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