

Growing a Gothic revival

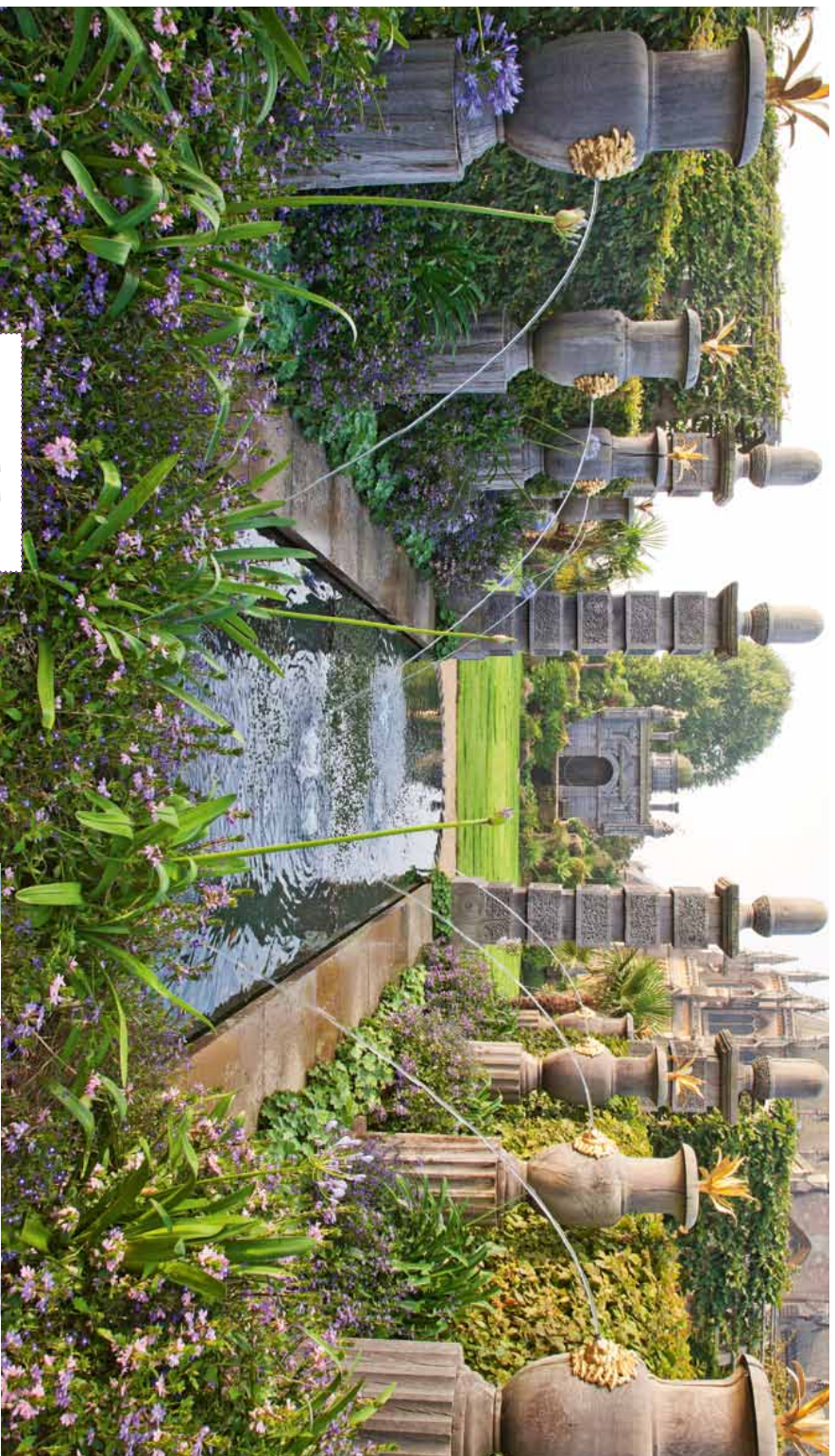
Making a garden with impact alongside a Medieval castle and nearby Victorian cathedral requires some boldly theatrical architectural planting >>

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Sussex Garden



The Slumpety at Arundel Castle Gardens in West Sussex is made from oak stumps gathered from the estate and placed between winding gravel paths. Its lush planting complements the ornate style of the Victorian cathedral across the road. Plants include euphorbias, hellebores, echiums and ferns. In the background are liquidambar and tree ferns.



Midsummer night's dream?

The Collector Earl's Garden (left) was commissioned from Julian and Isabel Bannerman who have also designed at Highgrove for the Prince of Wales) to replicate a large car park. The style ranges from ornate Italianate to just semi-romantic. It is populated by amazing structures, grottoes, follies, pergolas and monuments – all the things you'd expect to find in a fairytale. The eye is led across a grass labyrinth, stone arches and Oberon's Palace in the distance. This is a raised structure that also serves as a stage for plays – specifically productions of Shakespeare performed in front of audiences of about 600 gathered on the lawn on summer evenings. The hedges along the till are *Carpinus betulus* (hornbeam) with *Aitchornilla nodis* at their feet – there are drifts of *Allium hollandicum*, Purple Sensation, earlier in the season. The large terracotta pots in the foreground have *Agapanthus*, *Scaevola aemula* and trailing annual *Lobelia*.

There is something about a castle that makes the heart beat a little faster. All those battlements dripping with history; longbowmen, knights, and all the associated romance. Nowadays, of course, the blood has dried, arrow stiffs are well-proportioned windows and gardens flourish where once were kennels and farmyards, as can be seen in grounds around Arundel Castle in West Sussex. The castle has been home to the Dukes of Norfolk since the 12th century. The current Duke is the 18th, Martin Duncan

(formerly gardener to King Hussein of Jordan) is the current Head Gardener, and he leads a team of seven (and five vital volunteers) who look after 16ha (40 acres) of lawns and gardens.

Arundel Castle Gardens

Address: Arundel Castle and Gardens, Arundel, West Sussex BN18 9AB; 01903 882173; www.arundelcastle.org
Size: 16ha (40 acres)

Soil: chalky, well-enriched with added manure.

Age of garden: ranging from 12th to 21st centuries, but largely modern.

Aspect: within the town.

Summary: a gathering of gardens including cut flowers, vegetables, herbaceous, lawns and theatrical *louis de jance*.
Open: March until November.

Matter of scale

One of the problems with castles is that it is well nigh impossible to make a garden that is not dwarfed by the building – even the tallest trees are hard pushed to compete against an unassailable keep. This peculiarly aristocratic problem has been solved at Arundel because the gardens have all been made a short walk away – apart from the Rose Garden in the old bowling green, now struffed with David Austin's finest. They beck onto the impressive, but not overpowering, built of Arundel Cathedral.

The first garden you find is the Collector Earl's Garden. The Duke and Duchess commissioned this from designers Julian and Isabel Bannerman and it was opened in



The Collector Earl's Garden includes a domed pergola and exotic planting.

2008. It was transformed from a car park as a tribute to the 14th Earl of Arundel (1585–1646) – who spent much of his life restoring the family fortunes and building a spectacular art collection – and it is as you would expect from the Bannemans, a showstopper.

The Collector Earl's Garden consists of a pair of gravelled courtyards planted with golden Indian bean trees (*Catalpa bignonioides*, Auroel); these flank a glorious hill fed from a mossy grotto that then cascades past a pair of hornbeam-clad pergolas into a pool populated by terrapins. As if this was not enough, there is then a grass labyrinth (which sports *Allium christophii* in early summer) and a dramatic building called Oberon's Palace, a folly heaven from

green oak and decorated with shell mosaics and a golden coronet balancing on a single jet of water. This could be dismissed as mere gimmickry by the more humourless garden visitor were it not for the planting. Beginning with some simple but effective pots planted with trailing lobelia and the fan-shaped perials of *Scaevola aemula*, it soon booms into a truly magnificent semi-tropical border that exactly matches the exuberant Victorian revival gothicism of the cathedral. Towering blue echinums echo the pinnacles, splays of *Trochodiscus fortunei* follow the tracery, there are waving sails of hardy banana *Musa basilio*, statuesque *Eryngium pandanifolium*, mounds of *Persicaria microcephala* Red



Sussex Garden



Dragon' and scrambling *Nasturtium*.

'For extra colour we also introduced *Lilium lancifolium* and *L.* (African Queen Group) 'African Queen', ' says Martin, 'and so far this year I have caught 398 lily beetles – oh hang on, 399.' Jungly planting sometimes jars in English country gardens – not here: it accentuates the eccentricity and theatricality of the place.

Further delights

Leading away from this centrepiece are other gardens as interesting but rather different. A pair of classic English Herbaceous Borders, split into bays by scalloped yew hedges, peak in midsummer yet carry interest all season. This joins with the Organic Kitchen and Cut Flower Garden brimming with vegetables

and fruit: 'most of the produce is for the family, but we sell excess to visitors'. The flower garden dazzles with stands of dahlias (each with a straw-filled inverted pot to catch earwigs) and formally edged beds of *Salvia*, *Cleome* and sweet peas.

The newest garden, however, is the Stumpery, which backs directly on to the boundary wall overlooked by Arundel Cathedral: it was designed by Martin three years ago. 'I started by planting a border of tree ferns and *Liquidambar styraciflua* (for rich autumn colour) to show how it would work. Fortunately the Duke and Duchess have always been supportive and excited by changes in the garden.' The stumps came from the surrounding woodlands and the area is planted with a handsome

Luxuriant planting in formal setting

When Head Gardener Martin Duncan first arrived, there was a gnarly box hedge running through the English Herbaceous Borders. He tore it out and cut curves in the existing yew hedges, which makes the planting much more visible. The borders contain classic garden plants such as *Lupinus* 'Chandelier', *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', *Sisyrinchium striatum* and *Stachys byzantina* but with a slight twist – a large-leaved *Paulownia tomentosa* at the back and a fine variegated *Cornus controversa*. Plenty of annuals are packed in each year, such as the cloud of pink *Cosmos*. The soil throughout the gardens is dressed with masses of well-rotted manure mixed with Arundel Castle's own compost.

Overlooked by the Tropical Glass House (below) is a pond in the Organic Kitchen and Cut Flower Gardens at Arundel Castle.

mixture of *Euphorbia* and hellebores, while in summer *Dierama* swing their purple and pink bells.

A highlight during April and May is the Tulip Festival: throughout Arundel Castle Gardens, 30,000 tulips provide an explosion of springtime colour.

The gardens at Arundel manage to pull off a clever trick – in spite of the close proximity to such serious grandeur. Anyone who wanders through the castle among scattered old masters and rooms the size of aircraft hangars cannot fail but be slightly overawed. By contrast, the gardens are surprisingly intimate; the paths are not grand boulevards but winding lanes. The visitor can get up close and feel part of the garden rather than just a mere distant observer. These are gardens that are beautifully kept, and suitably ducal, but at the same time easily accessible and well worth a visit. ●

