

SUMMER OUTING

On Wednesday 13TH June 2018 The Haslemere Gardening Society visited

Haslemere
Gardening
Society

Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, Jermyns Lane, Ampfield, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 0QA

In 1953, Sir Harold Hillier, a renowned horticulturist, founded the gardens and arboretum. Over subsequent years, he curated an exceptional collection, comprising the most extensive and unparalleled array of trees, shrubs, and hardy plants in the United Kingdom. The gardens have achieved international recognition and are presently operated as a charitable organisation dedicated to horticulture, conservation, education, and recreation. Notable highlights include impressive seasonal planting displays across 180 acres.



Sir Harold Hillier Gardens is broadly recognised as one of the United Kingdom's premier arboreta and landscape gardens. Spanning **180 acres**, it offers a comprehensive tapestry of planting, heritage, and horticultural achievement. Established in 1953 by Sir Harold Hillier—an eminent plantsman—the gardens served initially as an extension of his global plant collection. After acquiring Jermyn's House, Hillier developed its grounds into what would become a world-renowned botanical resource. Transferred to Hampshire County Council in 1977, the arboretum is now managed as a charitable trust, focusing on conservation, education, recreation, and horticultural leadership, sustained by highly skilled horticulturists.

Owned by Hampshire County Council via the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens charitable trust, this site stands as the foremost modern arboretum in the United Kingdom. It contains an esteemed collection of more than 400 Champion Trees and fourteen National Collections. With over 12,000 taxa of wild and cultivated woody plants across 73 hectares (180 acres), totalling approximately 42,000 specimens, its breadth is exceptional. Founded in 1953 by the late Sir Harold Hillier, whose nursery sought to offer every hardy tree or shrub cultivar available in the British Isles, the arboretum continues to reflect Hillier's commitment to diversity and excellence.



A wide array of notable features characterises the gardens, including the Populetum—a dedicated collection of poplar trees—as well as over one hundred pine species (*Pinus*), such as the 'big cone' pine *P. coulteri* with cones weighing up to two kilograms. The gardens also encompass maple valleys, the largest winter garden of its kind in Europe, and a Gurkha memorial garden.

The significant number of trees and shrubs ensures a lasting impression on each visit. In particular, the four-acre Winter Garden near the Visitor Pavilion hosts more than 650 plants grown specifically for their winter appeal, selected to display optimal form, colour, and scent from November through March. Additional highlights include the Centenary Border, among the longest mixed double perennial borders in Europe, featuring herbaceous plants, bulbs, shrubs, and trees.

The gardens are distinguished by their extensive and varied botanical life. They house the largest collection of Champion Trees in Britain and Ireland, with 611 specimens recognised as the most significant of their kind. Fourteen National Plant Collections are maintained here, including oaks (*Quercus*), stone/tanbark oaks (*Lithocarpus*), dogwoods (*Cornus*), witch hazels (*Hamamelis*), dawn redwoods (*Metasequoia*), and others cultivated through the historic Hillier Nursery program. Noteworthy examples include *Magnolia macrophylla* subsp. *Dealbata*, renowned for its impressive three-foot leaves, and *Calycanthus* × *raulstonii* 'Hartlage Wine', prized for its vibrant red blossoms. The gardens collectively present more than 42,000 trees and shrubs representing roughly 12,000 taxa, underscoring their reputation as one of the largest collections of hardy plants globally.

Organised as a series of immersive horticultural landscapes, the gardens highlight unique environments, innovative design concepts, and distinct seasonal interest. Notable components include the Centenary Border, which ranks among Europe's longest mixed double herbaceous borders, offering dynamic displays of colour throughout the year. The Winter Garden, among the continent's largest, features dramatic bark, bold structure, pleasing fragrances, and winter-flowering shrubs, particularly noteworthy from November to March.





Sloping woodlands evoke Himalayan landscapes, planted with native regional species, and the Gurkha Memorial Garden showcases Himalayan flora alongside tranquil spaces for reflection. The presence of wetlands, biodiverse meadows, and ornamental lakes further enhances habitat diversity

Seasonal variation ensures year-round interest. Spring witnesses the blooming of magnolias, camellias, cherries, azaleas, and rhododendrons; summer sees the Centenary Border at peak vibrancy; autumn offers striking colours in maples, dawn redwoods, oaks, and other species; and winter brings forth witch hazels, vividly coloured stems, distinctive fragrances, and robust textures. Magnolia Avenue delivers outstanding spring floral displays, while Maple Valley is recognised for its autumnal brilliance.



Accessibility and visitor experience are integral to Hillier Gardens' design ethos. Paved walkways and mobility scooters facilitate exploration for all visitors. Families benefit from numerous activities tailored to children, complemented by amenities such as cafés and restaurants that support a comfortable visit.

Several attributes distinguish these gardens: their scientific significance as a genetic repository for conservation; artistic merit reflected in creative landscape design that imparts structure and atmosphere throughout the year; high esteem within the horticultural community; and immersive experiences spanning woodlands, meadows, water features, valleys, borders, and international plant collections. Collectively, the gardens exemplify a blend of botanical expertise, landscape artistry, ecological stewardship, and a commitment to visitor enjoyment rarely matched elsewhere.

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