

SUMMER OUTING

Wednesday 10th July 2024

Easton Lodge Garden, Essex CM6 2BB

The Gardens of Easton Lodge are a Grade II Registered historic landscape near Great Dunmow, Essex, celebrated for their Harold Peto–designed Italianate and Japanese gardens, sweeping woodland glades, and a layered history stretching back to the Tudor period.

These historic gardens date back over 400 years. They are run and maintained by volunteers and have a fascinating history and very friendly vibe.

Their most renowned owner was the Countess of Warwick, mistress of Edward VII. In 1902 she commissioned leading designer Harold Peto to create stunning formal gardens.

Abandoned in 1950 following the demolition of the original house, the gardens remained neglected for nearly 45 years. An extensive restoration programme commenced in 1993. Today, the 23 acres of gardens offer a distinctive atmosphere, as elements of their early splendour are meticulously revealed by volunteers. Visitors are invited to reflect on the gardens' historical significance while appreciating their serene present. Amenities include homemade refreshments and craft activities designed for younger guests. The gardens comprise an idyllic, partially wooded estate landscape that has been carefully rehabilitated since the 1990s by dedicated volunteers. Key features include formal Edwardian design elements such as terraces, balustrades, and water features; picturesque woodland areas punctuated with glades and specimen trees; a historic kitchen garden featuring heritage fruit varieties; and landscapes commemorating connections to World War II.

After being abandoned in 1950, the gardens were left untouched until a restoration began in 1993. Now spanning 23 acres, they blend restored Edwardian formal features, romantic woodland, heritage kitchen gardens, and WWII commemorative landscapes. Volunteers have revived the site into a tranquil, semi-wooded retreat with homemade refreshments and craft activities for children.

The setting is generally flat former hunting forest, later disrupted by WWII airfield construction and now returned to farmland.

Peto's work at Easton Lodge is regarded as his best in the East of England. Features of the Italianate Garden include a large pool adorned with waterlilies, stone balustrades and broad steps, honey-coloured paving, formal beds and borders, and lovely views of the fishing lake.

The Japanese Garden at Easton Lodge is the largest of its kind ever created by Harold Peto. It features a Japanese-style rill, woodland planting that enhances the tranquil atmosphere, and elegant trellage and pergola structures that complete the garden's serene design. The treehouse is Peto's original treehouse design, now reconstructed in the old oak.

The Glade is a defining feature of the gardens, enclosed by mature trees that create a tranquil atmosphere. At its heart lies the WWII Memorial Garden, which commemorates the Stirling bomber crews who were stationed on the wartime airfield. Visitors can also enjoy the stumpery and woodland walks that wind through this area, offering a chance to experience both the cultivated and wild aspects of the landscape. The surrounding land was once an ancient oak forest, cleared during World War II for the construction of the airfield, and has since been thoughtfully restored to its natural beauty.

The Walled Kitchen Garden is a productive garden, with a focus on heritage, featuring historic Essex fruit varieties, a range of seasonal vegetables, roses, and vibrant garden borders. Produce is often available for purchase during open days.

Gardens undergo distinct transformations throughout the year. In February, visitors can see large displays of snowdrops. During spring, daffodils bloom and fresh woodland leaves emerge. Summer brings waterlilies to the Italian Garden and flourishing roses in the kitchen garden. In autumn, dahlias and deep woodland colours become highlights of the landscape.