

Getting the best from your garden

Our summer special on gardens begins with some suggestions from **Norman Wright** for flowering bulbs to brighten your borders

JUST ABOUT the best thing you can do in the garden at this time of year... is sit in it. Apart from keeping on top of the weeds in your flower beds, doing a spot of dead-heading, watering up if the rain holds off and mowing the lawn weekly, there should be a bit of time to enjoy it.

Actually, that sounds quite a lot of work and if you have a kitchen garden you'll be even busier, but when the sun shines put the garden gloves and pruners aside for an hour or two and just relax – there's nothing better. Or get some friends and

family round, fire up the barbecue and pop a bottle of chilled Prosecco.

Our garden special covers getting the best out of your garden.

There's a section on some of the best barbecues available to help you entertain, and our resident wine expert Graham Sherwood recommends some supermarket wines perfect for alfresco drinking.

Summer is also a great time for visiting gardens and we have picked some of the superb National Trust gardens around the UK in case you fancy a day out.

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I'm not suggesting major landscaping, just spotting the gaps and when the borders flag a little and need a boost of colour to keep them going right through the summer season.

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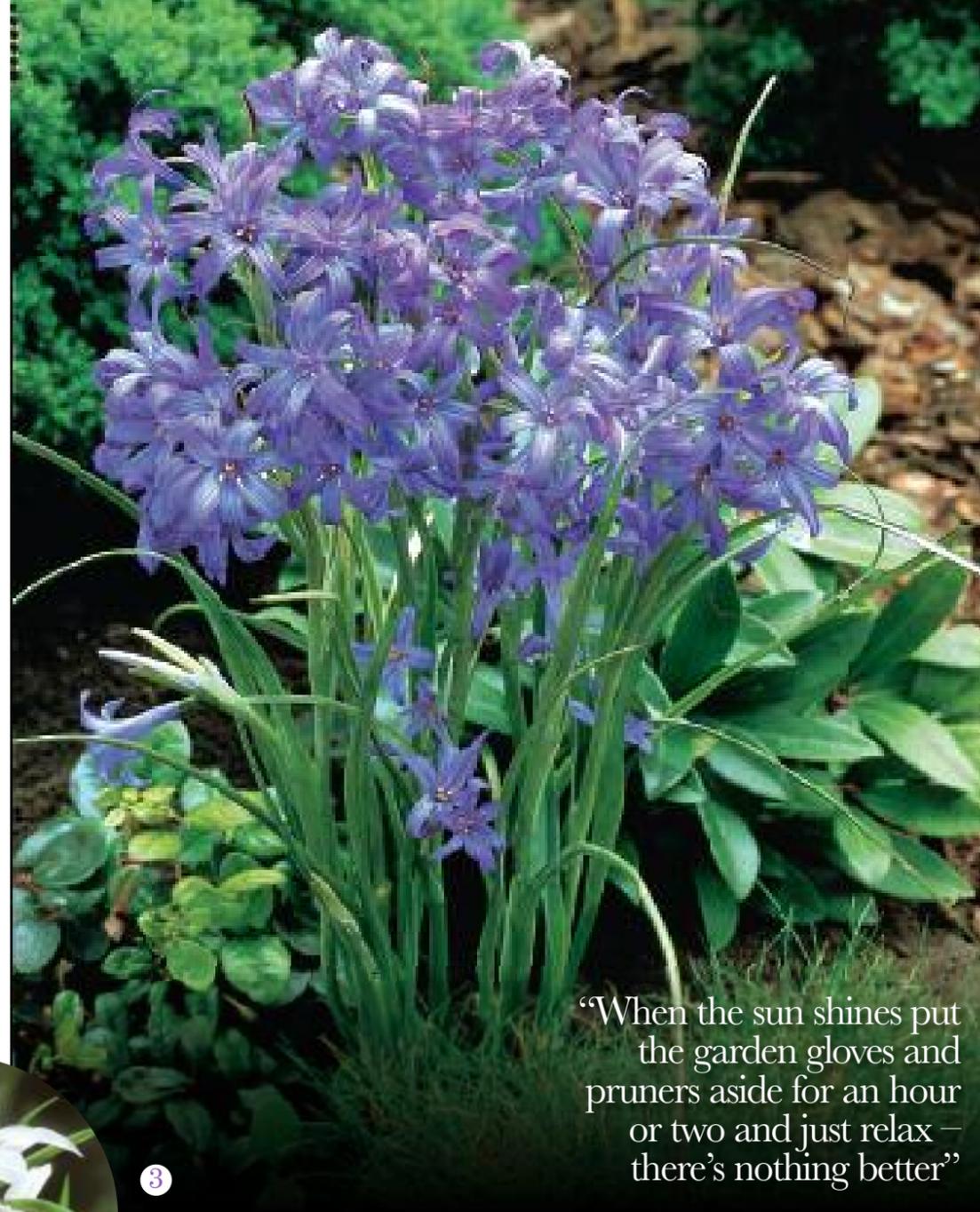
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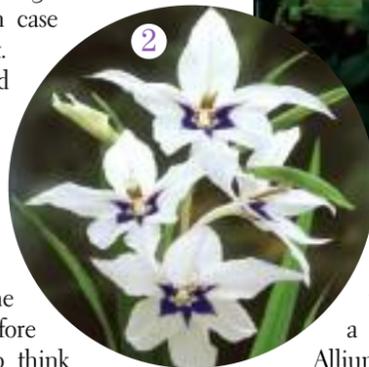
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1. Ornamental onions are extremely easy to grow and will add height and texture to a border. They like full sun.

Allium 'Big Impact Mixed' provide an assortment of flower shapes, sizes and colours in May and June and extremely attractive seed heads that will give similar structural interest through the autumn. They are also good for flower arrangements, both as flowers and dried seed heads.

The height in these collections ranges from two to three feet (60 to 90cm) prices are eight for £9.99 up to 32 for £19.99.

2. The Abyssinian Gladiolus (*Gladiolus murielae*) has white blooms with deep burgundy blotch at the base of each petal and are a classy addition to late summer borders, flowering in August, September and October with staggered planting. The richly scented flowers bow their heads downwards on beautiful curving stems. They also provide some height and structure, too, growing to around 35 inches (90cm) in full sun. 100 bulbs are £13.99.

3. The Blue Mountain Lily originates from the Middle East and is rarely seen in gardens. Flowers appear from May to July

in royal blue trumpets carried on upright stems. After flowering, it retreats into dormancy for the dry summer period before returning the following year. Ixiolirion is hardy, if naturalised in sheltered borders. Height is ten inches (30cm). 20 bulbs are £9.99, 40, £18.98

4. The Mariposa Tulip produces cup-shaped flowers on delicate stems in May, June and July. The white flowers of Calochortus 'Symphony' have lilac on the outside, set off against the distinctive grey-green foliage. This frost-hardy bulb is best used for the patio, greenhouse or conservatory. For borders, conditions must be dry. It will grow to 16 inches (40cm). Ten bulbs are £11.99 and 20, £16.99.

5. Montbretia Crocosmia 'George Davison' has arching stems tipped with an explosion of starry, golden blooms. It is tough and resilient, multiplying quickly to form large clumps when established. Thompson and Morgan recommend planting in large groups, and let them wander through sunny herbaceous borders.

Height is around 35 inches (90cm) and they will flower through July and August in sun or semi shade. Ten bulbs are £11.99 and 20, £16.99.

6. African Corn Lily Ixia 'Yellow Emperor' shows clusters of mimosa yellow, star-shaped flowers with contrasting wine-red centres carried above clumps of narrow foliage in early summer May, June and July. This South African corn lily makes an unusual addition to sunny borders and containers with its colourful and free flowering display. It will grow to about 18 inches (45cm). Five corms are £11.99, and ten £16.99.

7. Polianthes tuberosa is billed as the world's most fragrant bulb with spikes of waxy white flowers produced throughout summer. The semi-double, fragrant tuberosa flowers of this relatively unknown bulb are carried above narrow leaves. Polianthes tuberosa requires a minimum temperature of 15°C (59°F) so it is ideal for a heated greenhouse or conservatory. It can also be grown outdoors in containers or sheltered sunny borders, if it is lifted and stored frost-free over winter. Height is 35 inches (90 cm). Four bulbs are £11.99, 8, £16.99 and 16, £19.99.



■ All these bulbs are available from the Thompson and Morgan website (www.thompson-morgan.com), Tel: 0844 573 1818.

Offbeat barbeques

You can't beat a barbecue in your garden in summer. **Caroline Kingdom** reviews some of the more offbeat options



The Big Green Egg

The Big Green Egg is a luxurious charcoal barbecue grill that combines an ancient oriental ceramic cooking concept with state-of-the-art technology and design to offer strength, durability and heat insulation. Popular with celebrity chefs, the Egg gets to cooking heat within minutes and its patented airflow control allows you to achieve the right temperature to within a few degrees, and maintain it accurately. This makes it ideal for a host of cooking tasks, from grilling bangers and burgers to smoking ribs, cooking pizzas or even roasting chickens and turkeys.

The well-insulated ceramic shell is finished with a lifetime-guaranteed glaze in British Racing Green and wipes clean with ease. Inside, residual heat burns away any leftover grease, just like a self-cleaning oven.

■ The Egg is available in five sizes: Mini (£399), Small (£550), Medium (£700), Large (£850) and XL (£1250). To find out more, see the website: (www.biggreeneegg.co.uk), tel: 0843 216 2805.



WHEN IT comes to spending time in your garden, few things can be more enjoyable than a barbecue. Whether it's just two of you or a crowd, it's something most of us like to spend our summers doing. When you're choosing a barbecue, these days there are far more options with new technology ensuring restaurant-quality results. As well as the way they cook, it seems that the look of a barbecue is becoming almost as important. Here are a few of the more quirky choices.

The Mini Kadai Firebowl

If you prefer a totally portable barbecue, try the Mini Kadai, a portable firebowl/barbecue combination. It comes with a stand, grills, tongs and duffel bag. It's ideally suited for the garden, but also for trips to the beach, camping or any family outing.

■ The Mini Kadai Firebowl costs £98 and is available to buy direct from: (www.kadai.co.uk), tel: 01694 751279. There's also a Mini Kadai Cookware set priced at £52.



Low and slow barbecuing

Smoking is a perfect way to cook cheaper cuts of meat such as brisket and pork shoulders and ribs. The Smokey Mountain Cooker from Weber offers an opportunity to try out different smoking techniques.

Place hot coals in the smoker's chamber and fill the water pan. Choose the flavoured wood chunks – opt for oak or hickory for a strong flavour, or apple, pecan or cherry for something more subtle – and add to the coals. Layer up the

food on the cooking grates and then all you have to do is check the temperature and top up the water pan. It's great for 'low and slow barbecuing' and hot smoking.

■ The Smokey Mountain Cooker comes in three sizes, 37cm (£299.99), 47cm (£399.99) and, for very large numbers, 57cm (£499.99), which can take eight 'beer can' chickens or three boned and rolled pork shoulders. For your nearest stockist, tips and recipes, see: (www.weberbbq.co.uk), tel: 01756 692611.



The Verycook and the Verypizz

Already popular in France, the Verycook Plancha Grill is a new gas barbecue that's a fast and easy way to cook. As well as being pleasant to cook with, it's also attractive to look at, as it's available in more than ten colours and you can buy different-coloured covers should you wish to change them. It can stand on any level surface or you can buy an additional trolley table with matching colourful shelves to set it on. It can be used at home or taken on a camping trip.

Unlike a conventional gas barbecue,

the Verycook Plancha Grill cooks food indirectly over the gas, keeping it away from the flames and so avoiding flare-ups as a result of juices dripping on to the flames or hot coals or charcoal.

Connect it to gas, light it with the integrated Piezo-electric lighter and in three minutes it's ready to cook on. Two burners beneath the plancha provide two areas to cook with separate controls: sear on one, keep warm with the other. It has a raised edge which gives greater control when moving food around, and any excess juices or fats will drain away to the drip tray, leaving a healthier dish to enjoy.

You can also buy a separate outside pizza oven, the Verypizz, that cleverly sits on top of the plancha grill to make crispy pizzas. The heating power of the plancha grill means the Verypizz heats quickly to the perfect temperature to cook pizzas,

pies or bread. The pizza oven has a handy temperature thermometer so it's easy to get to the correct heat.

■ The Verycook Plancha Grill (priced from £319 to £429) and the Verypizz (£169) are both available from: (www.verycook.co.uk), tel: 020 3627 0937.



Wines to enjoy in the garden

Graham Sherwood advises how to make the most of the summer with his choice of ten wines to savour outdoors

JN THE UK we get so few opportunities to enjoy food and drink outdoors that we really should make the most of them. Here are ten of my recommendations to enjoy in the garden, with or without food.

No-trouble bubbles

There really can be no more opulent a way to enjoy a drink in the garden than with a glass of sparkling wine. My two current favourites are Italy's Prosecco, and Cremant de Limoux from the South of France. Resist the awful habit of putting pieces of fruit such as strawberries into the glass; the results are always disappointing.

To make a cheat's 'kir royale', buy a reasonably priced bottle of Spanish Cava and add a dash of crème de cassis. The biting austerity of the sharp-flavoured Cava is perfectly toned down with the beautiful rose-pink hue and creamy cassis.

- * Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Prosecco Conegliano, £7.50 to £9.99
- * Cuvee Royale Brut NV Cremant de Limoux, £10.99, Waitrose
- * Codorniu Cava Brut NV, £8.99 Waitrose (and other major stores).

A bit of zing

For pure mouth-watering freshness in a glass, two wines deliver on all counts. The globally popular Sauvignon Blanc is still in vogue and is widely available. Herbaceous aromas pave the way for attractive lemon and lime citrus flavours on the vibrant finish. Always select the youngest vintage available.

For a more thoughtful but equally clean, racy and crisply citrus flavour, why not try a Muscadet de Sevre et Maine sur Lie from France's Loire Valley? My personal white

wine of choice is the wonderfully floral Albarinho from the Rias Baixas region in Northern Spain; for my money it's the best Spanish white wine around.

- * Tierra y Hombre Sauvignon Blanc 2013, Casablanca Valley, Chile, £8.99, M&S
- * Domaine de la Tourmaline Muscadet de Sevre et Maine, 2013, £8.49, Majestic
- * Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Albarinho, Rias Baixas, Spain, £8 to £10.

Everything's rosé

Somehow the relatively unpopular 'pink' wines of the world often seem to bloom into our consciousness along with the sunny weather. The classiest rosés hail from either Tavel or Provence in France (often a little more expensive, too) but there are limitless varieties available from every corner of the world. Keep the alcohol and the colour light and don't over-chill.

- * Mirabeau en Provence Rosé 2013, Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, £8.99, Waitrose



Waitrose has a great selection of summer wines

- * Marques de Alarcon Rosado Vino de la Tierra Castille, Spain, 2013, £7.99, M&S.

Chill-out reds

Red wines for summer drinking need to be lightly chilled and not too high in the alcohol department. Two favourites are the ubiquitous Beaujolais (always try to buy one with the village 'cru' designation such as Julienas, Brouilly or Chiroubles) or another gem from the Loire, Chinon, made from Cabernet Franc. I would stress: do not over-chill (an hour before use in a fridge is enough).

- * Chateau de Pizay Morgon 2013 Beaujolais Cru, £11.99, Majestic
- * Chinon Le Paradis 2012, £9.99, Waitrose.

One of Graham's favourite summer wines is the Spanish Albarino



Garden drinking do's and don't's

- 1 Keep any wines in the shade (a plastic bucket with chilled water and a tea-towel on top is fine)
- 2 Plastic glasses are horrible to drink out of, so always use glass, but ensure you have stable platforms to place them on, especially when eating
- 3 It's incredibly easy to drink far too much while relaxing in beautiful sunshine, so keep aware of your consumption and check the alcoholic volume of the wines being drunk
- 4 Summer gardens contain insects. Sometimes wine glasses do, too...
- 5 Keep hydrated and drink at least equal amounts of water to wine. If you feel thirsty it's usually a sign you're already dehydrated.

Our greatest gardens

The National Trust cares for many of Britain's finest gardens. **James Henry** provides a regional round-up of some summer horticultural highlights

ONE OF summer's great pleasures is sitting enjoying a bit of peace and quiet in your own 'backyard', but it's also good to take a stroll around a classic large garden. The National Trust restores, preserves and cares for some of our greatest gardens and opens them up to all of us. It has gardens all over the country. Here are some of the best you might want to visit this summer.

Midlands

Biddulph Grange Garden, Staffordshire
Biddulph is a fine example of a delightful high-Victorian garden. Created by James Bateman for his collection of plants from around the world, it's a global journey from Italy to the pyramids of Egypt, to a Victorian vision of China. The garden features collections of rhododendrons, summer bedding displays, a stunning dahlia walk in late summer and the oldest surviving golden larch in Britain, brought from China in the 1850s.

The garden is laid out so that the visitor is led from one area to another in a journey of discovery and exploration. Each garden is separated by hedges, banks and rockwork. Paths, steps and tunnels lead from one to area to another, resulting in an intriguing journey of discovery.
* Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/biddulph-grange-garden/), tel: 01782 517999.

Near London

Claremont Landscape Garden, Surrey
It's easy to see why the quirky green oasis at Claremont was fit for a princess in bygone

days. It's not a typical garden of herbaceous borders, but an unusual oasis of trees and shrubs, where the views always change, the water sparkles and secret glades await.

Enjoy the stunning views and the perfect spot for a family picnic. With a luscious grass amphitheatre to relax on, this eye-catching earthwork is the only surviving example of its kind in Europe and it offers an excellent view down over the lake to the valley below. There's also a serpentine lake with a mysterious grotto and a vibrant camellia terrace which blooms in the summer.

- * Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/claremont-landscape-garden/), tel: 01372 467806.



The lake at Sizergh Castle, Cumbria

North West

Sizergh, Cumbria

Enjoy a satisfying stroll at Sizergh this summer, an unexpected treasure nestled on the edge of the Lake District. This much-loved family home stands proud in its natural setting. Explore the grounds where you will find the formal Dutch garden and the magnificent limestone rock garden. Admire the views and the tulips that border the terrace walls and take a walk to the beautiful kitchen gardens and orchard.



Visitors enjoying the Dahlia Walk at Biddulph Grange Garden, Staffordshire

Sizergh garden has been allowed to evolve and expand gradually over 300 years and is still being developed. Don't forget to venture into the 1600 acres of beautiful estate to spot the rich and diverse wildlife that call Sizergh their home.

Make a weekend of it:

Holeslack Farmhouse on the Sizergh estate is a Grade 2 listed building with many original features including a spiral staircase and 17th century oak cupboards (sleeps eight).

* Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sizergh/), tel: 01539 560951.

Wales

Dyffryn Gardens, Vale of Glamorgan

Dyffryn is a wonderful place to visit, with the Grade 1 gardens featuring a stunning collection of formal lawns, an extensive arboretum and a number of intimate garden rooms for visitors to relax in. The glorious sunshine streams through the garden's reinstated glasshouse, highlighting its impressive collection of cacti and orchids.

Dyffryn's amazing arboretum covers more than 22 acres and houses fantastic tree specimens from all over the world; it's the perfect place to go for some peace and to soak up the summer sun. Don't forget to visit the kitchen gardens where you can find vegetables and fruit trees that would have once supplied most of the house in its heyday.

* Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens/), tel: 029 2059 3328.

The Herbaceous Border at Dyffryn Gardens, South Glamorgan



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The Rotunda and Italianate Garden at Ickworth House in Suffolk

© NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/ANDREW BUTLER

Yorkshire and North East

Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Water Garden, North Yorkshire

What better way to enjoy a warm summer's stroll than by the cool water at this World Heritage Site. Marvel at one of the best surviving Georgian water gardens, with breathtaking views of the Cistercian Abbey, canals, neo-classical temples and elegant ornamental lakes.

Conservation work has opened up some eye-catching vistas, so there's a dramatic view around every corner.

There are 800 acres to explore with a medieval deer park, a Victorian high Gothic church, a Jacobean manor house and a surviving Cistercian corn mill. Visit this summer to enjoy the seasonal colour and charm of this beautiful landscape.

Make a weekend of it:

With 11 holiday cottages on offer, including apartments in the luxurious Fountains Hall and five cottages converted from a group of 18th century farm buildings, there's plenty of choice.

* Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey/), tel: 01765 608888.

South West

Hidcote, Gloucestershire

Cradled in the Cotswolds with panoramic views over the Vale of Evesham, Hidcote is sure to make a lasting impression. One of the most inventive gardens of the 20th century, it sets the trend for dividing a

garden into 'rooms', showing the fulfilment of a quiet American's English fantasy. Full of contrasts, this garden is fiery and red at one turn and calm and white at the next, where avenues lead into small pockets of shrubs, trees and unusual plant species from all over the world

Explore the maze of narrow paved pathways and discover secret gardens, magnificent vistas and plants that burst with colour. Find a quiet spot and sit on one of the ornate benches to watch green woodpeckers search for their lunch..

* Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hidcote/), tel: 01386 438333.



Children will love the concrete garden at Mount Stewart House in County Down

© NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/NAOMI GOGGIN

Eastern England

Ickworth, Suffolk

Surrounding the central Rotunda, the gardens at Ickworth Park are beautiful and diverse. Don't miss the informal Italianate Garden, one of the oldest surviving examples of its kind, created in 1821.

Discover the Victorian stumpery, a rockery made out of parts of trees which is one of the largest in the UK and beyond this lies the remnants of an 18th century walled garden, a magical summer house and a dazzling lake, a perfect place for a picnic. Before you leave, pay a visit to the Tea Party Oak: at around 700 years old, this is one of the oldest trees on the estate.

* Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ickworth/), tel: 01284 735270.

Northern Ireland

Mount Stewart House, Garden and Temple of the Winds, County Down

Mount Stewart is hailed as one of the most unusual gardens cared for by the National Trust due to its tapestry-like design. In early summer the formal displays of scented rhododendrons in the Italian, Spanish, Mairi and Shamrock Gardens are magnificent, and a great collection of scented lilies flower in succession all summer long in the Lily Wood. Due to the mild micro-climate, summer also brings in fresh new growth of ferns and tree ferns, with a large collection of sub-tropical ferns.

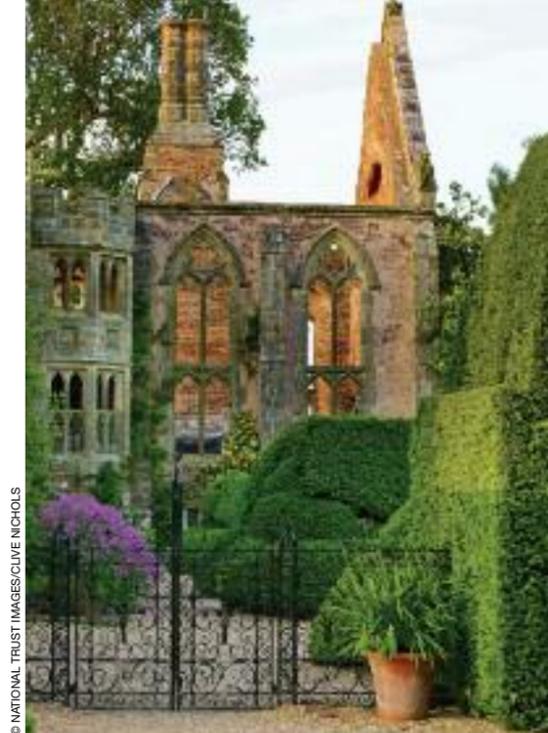
There are all kinds of things for children to discover as well, including red squirrels and butterflies, and where else would you find dinosaurs, cheetahs, orang-utans, squirrels and dodos resting among unique plants?

* Website: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart/), tel: 028 4278 8387.

South East

Nymans, West Sussex

Nymans is a garden-lover's home and the grounds boast a historic collection of plants, gathered from around the world, with the borders providing fresh and dynamic early-summer displays using unusual perennial plants and dahlias. Nymans is packed full of exotics, from Chinese and Chilean trees in the walled garden to the new South African bed. The



The ruins and topiary hedge at Nymans, West Sussex

terrace border, in front of the romantic ruins, evokes warmer, drier climates with Mediterranean and exotic planting. You can also look out for the eucryphias that produce big, starry white flowers in August, which along with other flowers, grasses and plants offer a treasure chest of colourful and unusual plants from summer onwards.

Scotland

Geilston Gardens, Dumbaron

The garden at Geilston was developed more than 200 years ago. It is a testimony to good landscape design – with the sum of its parts being greater than the individual constituents. These parts comprise a large walled garden with a dominating 100ft Wellingtonia tree (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) in the centre of the lawn, a kitchen garden and woodland area. The Geilston Burn wends its way through the north of the estate towards the Clyde in Cardross.

The walled garden is the focus of spring colour with azaleas, heathers and unusual shrubs such as *Cornus kousa* 'Satomi'. Summer colour is provided by the spectacularly vigorous species in the long herbaceous border; thalictrum, filipendula, eupatorium, helenium, phlox and sidalcea dominate the display.

* Website: (www.nts.org.uk/Property/Geilston-Garden/), tel: 0844 493 2219.