

'In May there's a sea of candelabra primulas'

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Melbourne Hall gardens, Church Square, Melbourne, Derby DE73 8EN

Picked by: Andrea Jones, garden photographer

'Broad sweeps of lawn, avenues and unexpected vistas belong to an exquisite stately home overlooking a large neighbouring mill pool – truly idyllic. In May atmospheric mists rise off the Great Basin lake and there's a sea of candelabra primulas along the banks of the millstream in the Long Border. You get good light and fantastic sunrises. Lady Ralph Kerr is an established artist with a wonderful eye. In her borders beside the stream she combines lemon, lime and lilac, yellow tree peonies and soft blue irises magnificently.

'There are wonderful wobbly yew hedges and a yew tunnel that allows shafts of light to illuminate the path beneath. There's also a wealth of wildlife here: in the fountain pools I often spot a frog or even a newt. I've explored this garden time and again with my camera, but there's always something new to photograph. As I travel a lot for work the garden is quite an oasis – a little piece of heaven. I drive off the motorway and into my own form of Narnia.'

FAQs

What's the history? Laid out in the early 1700s by Thomas Coke, Privy Counsellor and Vice-Chamberlain to Queen Anne, with George London and Henry Wise. Lord and Lady Kerr have run the estate since 1987.

Best bit? Robert Bakewell's 'Birdcage' – a wrought-iron arbour completed 1711.

RHS Partner Garden? Yes free for Members 2 Apr–28 Sep.

Contact details? 01332 862502; melbournehall.com

Disabled access? Yes; some steep slopes and steps; uneven paths; guide dogs only.

Can I make a day of it? At about 7ha (17 acres) it makes a good afternoon of exploring. Children love the paddocks with alpacas, goats, pigs and more. Courtyard shops and tearoom on site.

ANDREA JONES



TSC/FP/CLAYPERRY

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'The floating trees are delightful'



West Green House Gardens, Thackham's Lane, Hartley Wintney, Hook, Hants RG27 8JB

Picked by: Naomi Slade, garden writer and author

'Full of details and surprises, this garden combines imagination with a sense of fun. The moon gate and the Paradise Garden, with its apparently "floating" apple trees, are delightful. The innovative use of fruit trees in the design really sets it apart; they're covered in blossom and underplanted by tulips in spring, and laden with fruit and surrounded by dahlias when harvest time comes. They are a productive and structural leitmotiv: some planted as multistems, framing the views with a raised canopy above, others used as punctuation or trained in various ways. It is full of ideas for using fruit trees creatively throughout the season and I went back time and again when I was researching *An Orchard Odyssey*.

'West Green is gardened by Marylyn Abbott, former head of marketing at Sydney Opera House, and it says a lot about her sense of theatricality. I particularly like the crisp design and "show garden" appeal. As you go in, you see this insane front garden full of clipped evergreen doughnuts, each circling an apple tree, frothy with blossom in spring. Along the garden wall there are pots of big juicy parrot tulips in terracotta, orange and

purple, which chime brilliantly with the old red bricks.

'The Paradise Garden is an elevated pond with formal grass islands; these are interspersed with small roundels that appear to hover on the dark water, each one containing an incongruously substantial tree.

'I find this illusion amusing and enjoy the fact that the garden doesn't take itself too seriously, aspiring to entertain instead. It's a real breath of fresh air.'

FAQs

What's the history? Built by General Henry 'Hangman' Hawley in 1720. Victor Sassoon left the property to the National Trust in 1957; Quinlan Terry produced classical follies in the 1970s for Lord McAlpine, dedicating an obelisk to Margaret Thatcher. The lease was bought by Australian garden designer Marylyn Abbott in 1993.

Best bit? The view from the main entrance is breathtaking and sets the scene for the theatrical designs to come.

RHS Partner Garden? No, Adults £9.

Contact details? 01252 844611; westgreenhouse.co.uk

Disabled access? Accessible WC; guide dogs only.

Can I make a day of it? The garden is 4ha (10 acres), so allow about two or three hours. Courtyard tearoom for light lunches, homemade cakes, biscuits and ice cream. >>