

Glorious Gardens

May gardens gladden the heart, and even more so when they raise money for charity. Come and visit these Open Gardens with us.

For this, our May installment supporting the Open Garden season, we are featuring not one, not two, but three wonderful gardens – all very different to each other and each uniquely beautiful.

First off is Caxton Manor in Forest Row. Journeying along the tree-lined driveway you know there is something special waiting at the end, and disappointed you will not be. An impressive timber-framed house sits comfortably in the land, protected on one side by a large grass bank and stone-wall, and on the other a stunning sweep of landscaped garden and lake, complete with bridge and resident ducks, open up before you.

It really is a view with a 'wow', and if Adele Speelman, the proud owner of house and garden, hadn't enthusiastically taken me on the grand tour, I would have stood and stared for a long while. There is so much to take in, with the bright leaves of the acer, the blooms of camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons, set against the tactile texturing of mosses and succulents on the Japanese style rockery. Delicate hues of pink blossom and purple wisteria provide a dreamy quality, while the geometric

symmetry of the formal Japanese gravel courtyard brings you back to reality.

Adele and her husband Jules have lived in the house for over 30 years. It feels warm and homely, with the lead-lined windows creating frames which bring the gardens inside. Originally designed in an English style, about 10 years ago Adele began to transform the garden into the Japanese design it is today. She was inspired by a "mountainside covered with a whole tapestry of trees and colours," while they were traveling years before. "I always said to my husband, one day I will have a Japanese garden, and that's what I did."

Despite some major works dredging the lake, the National Garden Scheme happily welcomed Adele into their calendar. "It's worked out pretty well," Adele smiles, and tells me they have raised thousands for various charities over the years. "This year we are supporting St Catherine's Hospice," she says, "and they are so thrilled."

Having opened for the past 7 years, Adele knows what to expect from her visitors, and tells me she has people come back year after year to

continued on page 30 »

Caxton Manor



Quarry Cottages

« continued from page 28

see the garden mature. "My twin sister makes all the fabulous cakes and tea, and people enjoy them all over the garden – on the bridge seat, in the Japanese tea-house or perched on the rocks by the waterfall."

Children are very welcome and Adele provides them with bread to feed the giant coy carp in the lake, "Which they take right from the children's hands!" she says.

"We have the most wonderful visitors," Adele smiles. "And have such a lot of fun opening the garden." And I'm not surprised; with such a warm welcome and a stunning garden to explore, it's a

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wonder people ever leave.

But leave I must, not very far however as the next garden to visit is just at the top of the hill. This garden is at 2 Quarry Cottages and belongs to Hazel Archibald. At just ¼ of an acre, this little garden could not be more different from Adele's 4 ½ acres down the road – different but equally as wonderful.

As you step through the gate next to the cosy cottage you are faced with the garden almost in its entirety, climbing up the naturally formed rock face, which has sculpted the layout of the garden. Hazel has made the most of this feature and used it to create a secluded terrace at the bottom of the planted rockery, rich with ferns and lush greenery, and sprinkled with pops of colour from tulips, alliums, honesty and bluebells. "It has been described as English with a twist of French," Hazel tells me.

At the top of the winding stone staircase through the foliage, the lawn opens out a little and a twisting beech tree takes centre stage. Then into the next 'room' of the garden Hazel has cultivated a neat and well-packed vegetable patch. "I can even grow melons in the greenhouse," she tells me proudly.

Over the years Hazel has opened her garden she has kept a visitors book, which makes for heart-

warming reading. I save it until the end of the weekend," she says. "Then I sit down with a glass of wine and read all the comments. They make it even more worth while."

The third garden opening its gates this May is Birchanger Garden in Balcombe. This is home to Rae Worrall, and is one of the best known private gardens in the area, having invited the public in for over 35 years. The garden is open for the first 3 weekends in May this year, and is supporting a different charity for each open day; Balcombe W.L., Balcombe Village Hall, Macmillan Nurses, St Catherine's Hospice, NSPCC and St Mary's Church in Balcombe.

The garden is a vast 7 acres and takes about an hour and a half to walk around. To help you along the way, there are arrowed routes, and information boards tell you about the flora and fauna as you pass.

Across the green open lawns you can enjoy the view of the brightly planted beds, well established flowering bushes and beyond, a large lake and tiny pond. Rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias provide great swathes of colour as you walk down secluded pathways, and an Etruscan style temple provides a haven of calm and relaxation. And after you have enjoyed all on offer, a well deserved tea and cake are served on the lawn. □

Opening Times

Caxton Manor: 15/16 May, 2-5pm. Wall Hill, Forest Row.

2 Quarry Cottages: 15/16 May, 2-5pm. Wall Hill Road, Ashurst Wood.

Birchanger Gardens: 2/3, 9/10, 16/17 May, 2-5.30pm.



Birchanger Garden