

'The Professional Gardeners' Guild Study
Tour of
The Gardens of Northern France'



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14th-21st September 2016

Introduction

The Professional Gardeners' Guild departed for what promised to be an insightful and informative tour of The Gardens of Northern France on the 14th September 2016. The PGG were fortunate to visit a wide range of gardens that are featured in the brief resume of locations. These gardens included Jardin de Kerdalo, Château de Canon, Le Bois des Moutiers Château Gardens, Le Vasterival, Le Jardin Plume, Monet's Gardens and Versailles. This report will provide details of my aims and objectives as well as relevant historical information on the gardens. There will be information on the plants that were recorded. The work programme will be included and a final budget breakdown of the tour. The Chairman of The PGG Tony Arnold was involved in conducting the work programme. Julie (tour guide) provided the group with a guided tour as we commuted between gardens by coach.

Aims and Objectives

My aim was to learn about the plants that the group logged along the way, as well as gaining more knowledge about the different styles of gardening that's practised in Northern France. I am interested to know what makes them so different from one another. I will also highlight the similarities that the gardens have and identify what they have in common.

Another objective has been to see how important historical events have shaped the gardens that we see today. A number of these gardens are iconic relics in French history. Does this influence the way in which professional horticulturalists approach their gardens in France?

Brief Resume of Locations

Jardin de Kerdalo

During the first tour we learnt from our speaker that the founder of the gardens was very much a plant enthusiast as well as a painter and architect. There are clearly a lot of Italian garden influences that are displayed within the gardens. However, I was mostly enlightened by understanding that Head gardener Lionel Fortescue worked alongside the Head Gardener at Kerdalo and was a family acquaintance. Fortescue's influence at Kerdalo was very clear. Having worked at The Garden House in Devon myself it was an interesting comparison to see how both gardens used similar plants and planting styles. Kerdalo could almost be mistaken as a Devonshire garden in Northern France.

One of the most prominent trees which I learnt about at Kerdalo was *Tilia henryana*. The tree stood out for its noticeably attractive foliage that is heart shaped and serrated. The petiole is red in colour and is perpendicular to the leaf. The leaf has a hairy appearance and the leaf arrangement is alternate. There is a plant newly introduced to the United Kingdom known as *Tilia henryana* 'Kerdalo'. This is a great improvement on the usual form in the UK, growing comparatively strongly and upright to at least 10 metres, with a healthy, full, rounded crown. The tree provides autumn interest as it flowers at this time of year.

Podocarpus salignus is another tree that attracted my attention. This tree is evergreen and has a finer texture of foliage. It can be clipped to produce a denser growth habit, even to the extent of creating a hedge. *Podocarpus salignus* can be grown in both ericaceous and alkaline soils. I was very fortunate to encounter these specimens.

Chateau de Canon

Chateau de Canon was built in the middle ages and the existing castle's single story was enlarged over the years. The estate was completed in a short time along with its Greco Roman Temple and Chinese Pavilion. The rivers and springs are important features and a water pump and avenue was installed. There is fifteen acres of Landscape Park and a family garden. The garden has an English style where there were festivals and fireworks that brought the gentry and people in the villages together to celebrate. This must have been an extraordinary accomplishment during this period.

The gardens withstood a significant amount of destruction in the Second World War. People hid in the treetops from air raids. The gardens reopened in 1982; gardeners were hired and the management changed. Unfortunately this wasn't to be the only detrimental event that the gardens endured. A storm which occurred in 1999 caused most damage to the garden as 80 percent of the trees fell. Eventually and very fortunately \$25,000 was granted to reinstate the trees.

Chateau De Brecy

Chateau de Brecy's garden archives disappeared in the Second World War. As the whereabouts of these documents are unknown it must have been a challenge to interpret the historical information accurately. The heirs of the owner had no love or passion for the gardens themselves. There is a horseshoe arrangement of lime trees which is very typical of France. These are *Tilia mongolica* which are commonly known as Mongolian limes. There are many existing fruit trees but there is no knowledge of when they were planted. Their crowns are lifted seasonally. The Hornbeams are clipped four times in the summer.

Tilia mongolica has a glossy green leaf and the leaf margin is coarsely toothed. The petiole is long and the leaf arrangement is alternate. This tree is a real statement in the garden as there is year round interest with its transitional foliage from summer to autumn. The tree also bears small, round and hard fruits (or nuts) that are decorative in appearance.



Another plant featured at Chateau de Brecy was the *Heptacodium miconioides*, which is a fast grower and is not too challenging to grow in the garden. The optimum conditions are ideally moist, acid woodland soil that is not too shady. "If it grows too large and unmanageable careful shaping can reduce it, and it is probably wise to remove twiggy growth from low down so the bush does not become too wide."

Shamrock Gardens

At the Shamrock gardens we were given an insight into the extensive Hydrangea collection that is planted over this undulating garden landscape. The acidic soil provides exceptional growing conditions for these plants to thrive and flower at their best. The Hydrangeas that were discussed included *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Black Steel', *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Zorro' and *Hydrangea serrata* 'Warabe.'

"Hydrangeas are one of the mainstays of a summer garden, giving a huge display of colour which lasts well into autumn." The flower heads left over in the late autumn boasts a strong sculptural presence at Shamrock Gardens; this is enhanced by the impressive amount of varieties that these gardens have to offer. They come in a huge range of colours from white to deep purples. The flowers can be extravagant and large or delicate and petite. *"There are two main types; the mop head which is a large round ball and the lace-cap which has a border of large petalled flowers with tiny flowers inside."*

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Black Steel' is a bold example of a Hydrangea supporting a large flower head. *Hydrangea serrata* 'Warabe' on the other hand is smaller and has a completely different flower structure. I was taken by the plant collector's enthusiasm. Having been in horticulture professionally for five years myself (three years as a trainee gardener and two years as an assistant) I've realised increasingly that devoting yourself to a specific plant and specialising in that plant gives you great job satisfaction.

Le Vasterival

At Le Vasterival it was clear that its history is steeped in a passion for the arts, music, and philosophy. The gardens today have a staffing level of two gardeners and one apprentice. They are working with mostly an acidic/ clay soil and they are appointed to work in both a kitchen and vegetable gardens.

At Le Vasterival there were some outstanding plants. There were plants such as *Eucryphia lucida* 'Pink Cloud' and *Eucryphia x intermedia*. The five species of small trees in the genus are native to Chile, Tasmania and south-east Australia, so unsurprisingly these plants are good examples that have migrated globally. Their native habitats are temperate rainforest but they grow well in the UK which makes them a gardener's favourite.

Eucryphia has evergreen foliage and can be seen to have cup-shaped fragrant flowers that appear later in the growing season when not so many other plants are flowering at their full capacity. This makes them a versatile plant in a mixed border that combines herbaceous plants and shrubs together.

Eucryphia is currently the only genus of plants placed in its own family, *Eucryphiaceae*. The white flowers are very attractive to bees and as a result honey is an important bi product that is sold in Tasmania.

L'Elang de Lavnay Garden

L'Elang de Lavnay garden was without doubt awe inspiring and visually impressive. There was no horticultural impetus here twenty six years ago. The grounds were expanded and landscaped to allow for a vast variety of plants to exist. During the tour our guide shared his infectious enthusiasm for the plants that he has nurtured here over the past twenty six years.

Viburnum furcatum is arguably one of the most beautiful of its genus that grows remarkably well at L'Elang de Lavnay. The plant grows naturally on the islands of East Asia. It flowers in March to April and produces white inflorescences with a group of large sterile flowers surrounding the smaller fertile central ones. Only after flowering do the large round leaves open. As a juvenile leaf they are red and wrinkled, later in the season they become a broad leaf that is deep green. Before shedding their leaves they take on a carmine autumn colour.

Viburnum furcatum is commonly known as the scarlet leaved viburnum. It is self-sterile, so produces berries only if there are other plants in close proximity of a different origin. When cross-pollination is successful, red berry clusters are produced, which change interestingly in autumn to black. Our tour guide and gardener planted this mostly for its autumnal colour. Like many other viburnums, this species is happiest in partial shade, there were many areas of the garden that provided shade at L'Elang de Lavnay. *Viburnum furcatum* favours rich forest soils which retain moisture. It was evident that the soil provided ideal growing conditions. Many of the trees and shrubs that we encountered on the visit seemed exceptionally healthy as a result.

As we walked on through the garden the tour guide drew our attention to the nearby *Magnolia macrophylla* subsp. Dealbata. This was of particular interest to me, as I have developed a sentiment towards *Magnolia grandiflora* having nurtured this type of tree in all of my work placements. It was warming to come across an alternative Magnolia. The Cloud Forest Magnolia is a very rare species of North American magnolias. This Magnolia is known to be the Mexican cousin of the American broad leaved Magnolia (*M. macrophylla*); the species is endangered in its natural environment and can be seen at some botanical gardens.

The foliage is distinctively tropical looking and is very broad in appearance. The tree displays large white flowers in late spring that are well scented. *M. macrophylla* subsp. Dealbata can reach heights of a hundred and fifty feet in southern Mexico, but should only be expected to grow up to thirty to forty feet under Mid-Atlantic cultivation. Further along our walk there were two other plants of interest.

Interestingly there was *Iris* grown on the roof tops. This is traditional in France and is a typical scene from an aerial view. The garden owner didn't expand on the reasons behind this tradition. I felt this was a very good way of using horticultural displays to enrich architectural structures. Later in the tour I noticed this more and more after visiting this spectacular garden.



Le Jardin Plume

The next garden we visited was created in 1996; Le Jardin Plume has an abundance of wild perennials. The flora is prolific and endearing. There is a true element of surprise when you walk through to see these magnificent displays of colourful perennials. There is a spring garden in the East and many annual and biannual plants in “The Garden of Flowers.”

Le Jardin Plume has a renaissance style with three buildings that have low exteriors. There are many straight lines and strong edges that contribute to underpinning its exuberance.

There are various hedges and structures positioned to protect the garden from the south prevailing winds. The “waves” in the box hedge are there to show “movement” and continuity. The box hedging has been planted for practical and aesthetic reasons and there are many plants spilling over the low laying hedges. These hedges are clipped three times a year. On looking the periphery away from this intensely planted design there are apple trees and lots of ground for livestock that are grazing.

The name ‘Le Jardin Plume’ is given incandescently. The use of see through plants that stand proud in the evening sun and the sense of movement that the tall sweeping plants provide makes its name very fitting. Interestingly the garden has been described to be in the same spirit as Versailles although undeniably different in appearance.

Palace of Versailles

The Palace of Versailles was ruled by the five year old Authoritarian King Louis XIV. Traditionally there was a dressing ceremony known as The Rising of the King. The Versailles people were treated as prisoners in their own palace. There were thirty six thousand men and six thousand horses. These numbers are astonishing and as a visitor this was an overwhelming statistic. Additionally we learnt whilst on the tour that historically there were imposing military campaigns against Holland. There was hostility towards the Dutch because of Holland being a predominantly protestant country.

The Palace is classical inspired and much of its architecture is reminiscent of Ancient Rome. The Statues of Hercules and Apollo show off the Palace's military strength. Versailles is the ultimate symbol of French Glory.

The gardens themselves are a testament to Andre L'Notre's influential horticultural status. He invested his talents into Versailles. It is recorded that seventy five thousand trees have been imported to Versailles over the years.

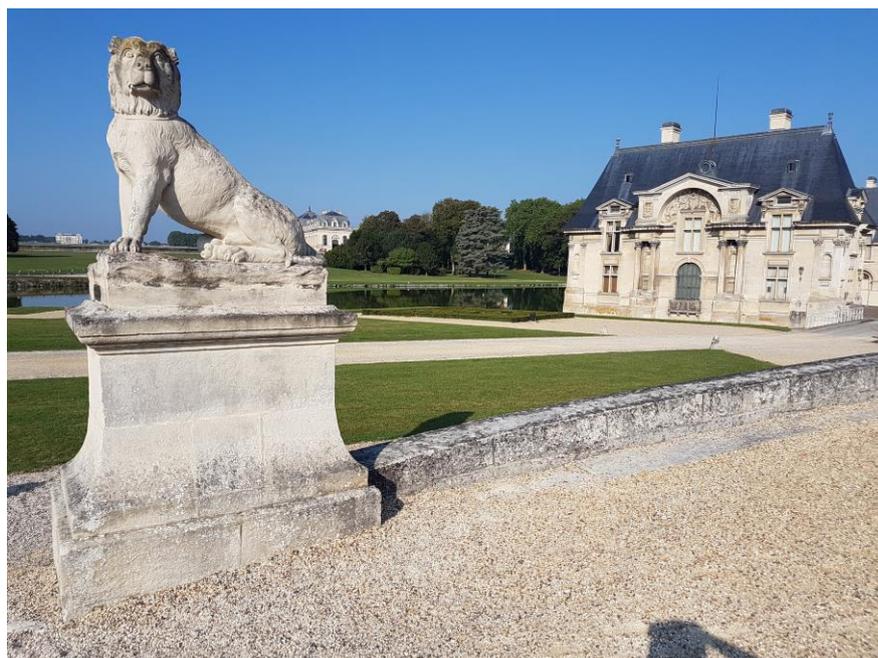
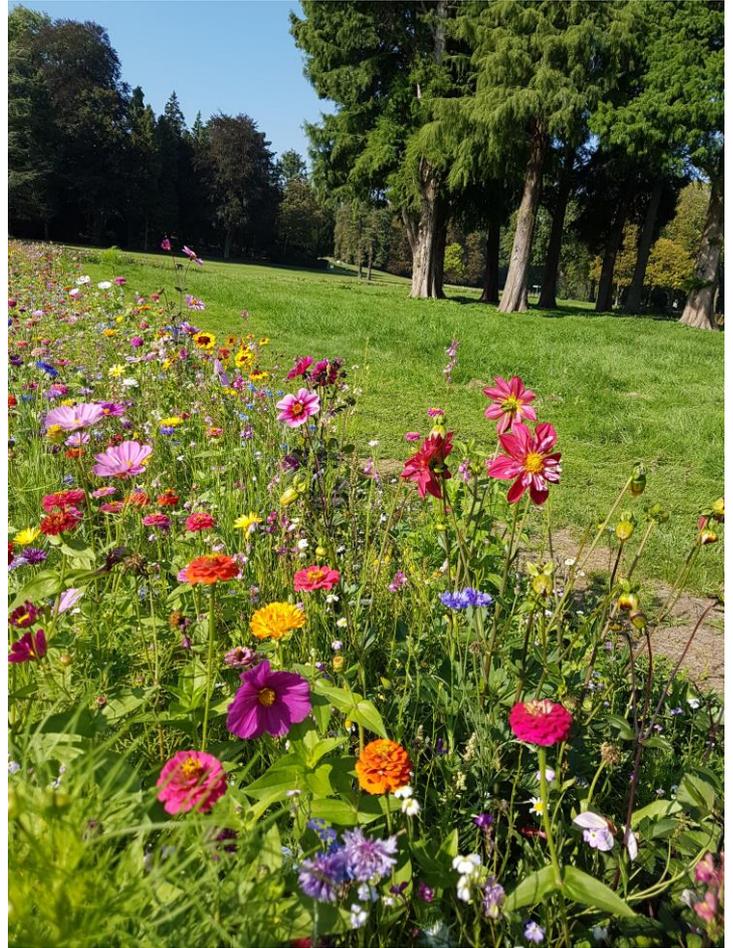


I was captivated by the sheer scale of the gardens. Versailles did not disappoint. Monet's garden at times felt over run by tourists and commercial motives that detracted my attention away from the garden. Versailles eclipsed everything Monet's garden had to offer as a place that is reputed to be historically and socially significant.

Chantilly

Chateau de Chantilly comprises of three distinctively different gardens. There are English, French and eighteenth century anglo – Chinese gardens. The grounds surround a medieval fortress that is embedded in Chantilly's history through its alluring romanticism and captivating mythology. There are fountains, cascades, water parterres and basins that have been created to emanate the element of surprise. These surprises were interpreted as being magical displays in the eighteenth Century. The gardens have been designed to give this impression to the present day.

The property epitomises a classical French Chateau and garden in its own right. The Chateau was once home to noteworthy and charismatic figures in French history including General Joffre who had his headquarters here in WW1 and the Duke of Aumale, son of King Louis – Philippe. Andre Le Notre made his mark on Chantilly by designing the Grand Canal, waterfall and French Parterres that shows part of his influential legacy.



Report Conclusion

On arriving Chantilly (our last day of tours in France) I'd already made up my mind that we had seen an astonishing variety of gardens over the past eight days. There was undoubtedly speculation from the group members that a few of the gardens would be very similar to one another (personally I've noticed this response when visiting a collection of gardens in the UK.) It turned out that there were a few similarities but the gardens themselves were all very unique.

Versailles is the *crème de la crème* of gardens when considering its style and magnificent magnitude. Versailles exudes greatness and glory above and beyond many gardens of its kind as well as patriotic pride and prowess. My experience of Northern France informed me that many of the gardens such as 'Le Jardin Plume' and 'Chateau de Chantilly' were emulating elements of such grandeur in the garden and doing this in a distinctively different way to Versailles.

Additionally I have learnt about many plants along the way. I've learnt increasingly as a horticulturalist how these plants can grow enormously in a different climate. I was surprised to see how advanced these plants are in France. A lot of France's countryside and pastureland looks similar to the UK. This was apparent when traveling by coach. These appearances can be deceiving. All things considered there is an advantage for the professional gardener in France with the warmer climate. I'd noticed this when starting my gardening journey in Devon when I'd moved away from the midlands. It was a pleasure to have seen this once again in France.

Budget Information

Tailored Travel organised the trip to a programme arranged by the Professional Gardeners' Guild. The total cost was advertised at £1,109 for an eight day tour which is available on the PGG website. I opted for the single room supplement which meant in total I paid £1,318 (a deposit of £100 was made earlier in the year). Tailored travel was the travel company that arranged the cost for accommodation, the meals that were included on specific nights and the ferry crossing from Portsmouth to St Malo, and the travel by coach. Other meals and expenditure was covered financially by me personally.



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