



# 25 *'Secret'* Gardens

With its wealth of beautiful gardens, Sussex is a plantsman's paradise. Leigh Clapp selects some of the very best to visit this year

PICTURES BY LEIGH CLAPP



## 1 Arundel Castle

The Duke and Duchess of Norfolk's award-winning Collector Earl's Garden, with its theatrical design evoking a Jacobean classical Capriccio was opened by the Prince of Wales in May 2008, and has been intriguing and delighting visitors ever since. It was conceived as a light-hearted tribute to Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel, who was known as The Collector. Imposing architectural temples, urns and water features are adorned with bold plantings of palms, bamboos and tropical exotics. Other areas of the castle's gardens include herbaceous borders, wildflowers, an organic kitchen garden, old-fashioned roses and cut flower beds.

### OPENING TIMES

Arundel Castle, Arundel BN18 9AB  
 April - 1 November,  
 Tuesdays to Sundays, Bank Holiday Mondays and all  
 Mondays in August (10am - 5pm)  
 Admission £9 - £18 depending on combinations  
 of garden and castle  
[www.arundelcastle.org](http://www.arundelcastle.org)

## 2 Bakers House

Large Wealden parkland garden with formal and informal areas, including a scented knot garden, lawns with mature trees, a tunnel cascading with racemes of golden laburnum, a secret white garden and a pretty potager. Over 200 roses feature in this quintessential country landscape, guided by owners Mark and Margot Burrell. Elegance balanced with country informality are the key words to describe the ambience of Bakers House.

### OPENING TIMES

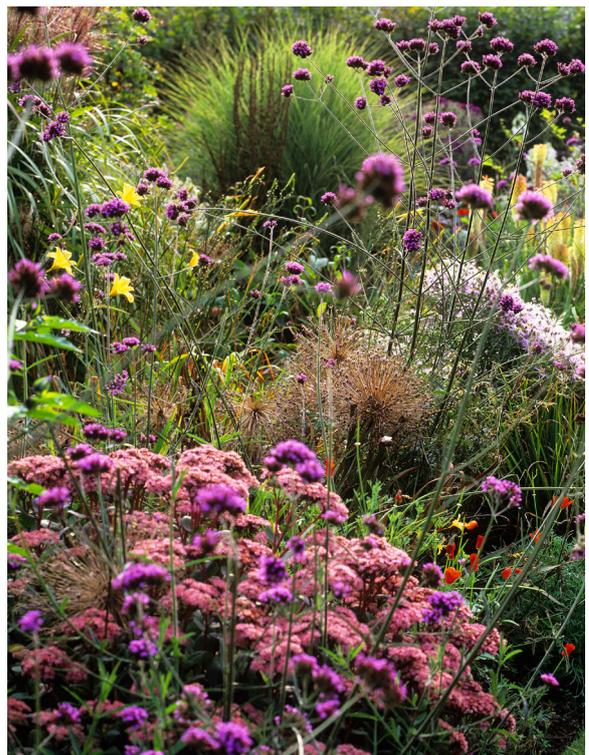
Bakers House, Shipley, RH13 8GJ  
 For The National Gardens Scheme  
 (NGS): Sundays 24 May and  
 21 June (2-6pm)  
 Admission £5, children free  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

## 3 Bates Green

Textural combinations with year-round colour and interest. Carolyn and John McCutchan have created a two-acre garden with style and atmosphere. Stroll the paths and woodland areas, enjoy the rhythmical borders of rippling grasses and perennials backed by formal hedges in the circular garden, and be inspired by the broad palette of plants in each season. Springtime sees bulbs and coloured stems; summer blazes with geraniums, alliums, kniphofias, crocosmias and grasses; followed by an autumnal crescendo of dahlias, asters, verbenas and miscanthus.

### OPENING TIMES

Bates Green, Arlington, BN26 6SH  
 For the NGS: visitors welcome by  
 arrangement March to October,  
 excluding August  
 Admission £5, children free  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)  
[www.batesgreen.co.uk](http://www.batesgreen.co.uk)





**4 Bignor Park**  
A stalwart of the National Gardens Scheme, the Mersey family have been opening their 11 acres of peaceful gardens to the public for more than 60 years. Ned and Clare Mersey are continuing the evolution of the historic gardens. The essence of the layout created by renowned landscape designer and artist William Sawrey Gilpin in the 1820s remains, and the formal gardens by the house have much the same structure as at the end of the 19th century. Elements of the past are combined with new planting and redesign, such as replanted herbaceous borders in the walled flower garden. Enjoy magnificent views of the South Downs, mature trees, wildflower areas, unusual contemporary sculptures, the peaceful Zen pond, a temple and Greek pavilion.

**OPENING TIMES**  
Bignor Park, Pulborough, RH20 1HG  
www.bignorpark.co.uk  
For the NGS: Sunday 7 June, Sunday 20 September (2-5pm)  
Admission £5, children free

**5 Borde Hill Garden**  
A series of rooms set within 200 acres of parkland and woods offer visitors different gardens to explore - from the formal Italian and rose gardens to subtropical plants in the dell or the dappled shade of the woodland. Camellias, azaleas, rhododendrons, magnolias and bluebells star in spring, while later more 450+ roses, including the collection of more than 100 David Austin varieties, add a touch of romance. The listed, historic garden continues to evolve since its inception in 1893, from the days of the great plant hunters, to maintain and expand the internationally renowned collection.

**OPENING TIMES**  
Borde Hill, Haywards Heath, RH16 1XP  
www.bordehill.co.uk  
daily from 28 March until 13 September  
Sundays in September and October  
Halloween: 23 October to 1 November (10am-6pm or dusk if earlier)  
Admission £8.18, children £5

**6 Butlers Farmhouse**  
One-acre rural garden that is mainly herbaceous, with some eclectic, quirky features. Rainbow-themed border, small pond, Cornish-inspired beach corners, secret jungle garden, recycled sculptural pieces, a large wildlife pond being restored and a most unusual separate garden of poisonous plants, complete with skull and crossbones sign on the gate. A warm welcome is ensured from enthusiastic plantswoman, owner Irene Eltringham-Willson, who is also the East Sussex NGS County Organiser, and her husband Peter, a jazz musician.

**OPENING TIMES**  
Butlers Farmhouse B&B, Herstmonceux, BN27 1QH  
For the NGS: Saturday 8, Sunday 9 Aug (2-5pm) with jazz in the garden  
Admission £5, children free  
Visitors also welcome by appointment  
www.ngs.org.uk  
irene.willson@btinternet.com

**7 Clinton Lodge**  
Lady Collum has created a truly beautiful series of romantic garden rooms that epitomise the classical English style. From a peony walk resplendent with these blowsy blooms in spring, to the Elizabethan scented herb garden with camomile paths and a cloister walk inspired by a pre-Raphaelite painting, or the wafting beauty of the rose garden with its impressive William Pye water feature; there is so much to enjoy. Recently created areas include a shady glade, a small knot garden, a canal garden and an orchard.

**OPENING TIMES**  
Clinton Lodge, Fletching, TN22 3ST  
www.clintonlodgegardens.co.uk  
For NGS: Monday 15 June; 3 August (2-5.30pm)  
Admission £5, children free  
www.ngs.org.uk

**8 Denmans**  
Home of renowned garden designer and writer, John Brookes MBE, the garden showcases that along with flower colour, long-season interest and form can be created by appreciating the shape, size and colour of foliage as well. The garden is spread over four acres with both intimate and sweeping vistas, punctuated by the planting combinations, statuary and urns. Gravel is used for paths and as a growing medium to create casual, naturalistic effects. There is also an attached nursery and award-winning café.

**OPENING TIMES**  
Denmans, Fontwell, BN18 OSU  
www.denmans-garden.co.uk  
Daily, except 25, 26 December, 1 January (10am-4pm)  
Admission £4.95, children £3.95

**9 Driftwood**  
With every inch of soil covered by a cheerful array of plants and no lawns, owner Geoff Stonebanks has created an inspiring garden for small spaces and also for coastal planting. The exposed front garden is beach-themed with an old timber rowing boat, lobster pots, fish crates, sculptural driftwood and rusted metal features, and is planted with wafting grasses, bright perennials and agaves, all set in gravel. In contrast the back garden is a layered tapestry of colourful planting, quirky installations, and is home to over 400 different varieties of plants and shrubs that draw the eye as you wander the winding paths.

**OPENING TIMES**  
Driftwood, Bishopstone, Seaford, BN25 2RS  
For NGS: Tuesday 9, Thursday



25 June, Tuesday 7 July, Sunday 9 August (11am-5pm)  
Admission £4, children free  
Visitors also welcome by arrangement June to August for groups of four to 20.  
www.ngs.org.uk

**10 Follers Manor**  
A contemporary garden with a real 'wow' factor designed by Ian Kitson from a blank canvas set in a picturesque rural location. Owners Geoff and Anne Shaw had two musts: that the garden be wildlife-friendly and colourful. The resulting scene is one of wildflower meadows, sinuous shapes from stone walls protecting a sunken paved seating area, meandering paths down to curvaceous decking around a large pond, along with shimmering perennials and grasses shimmering into the landscape beyond. Winner of Sussex Heritage Trust Award and three awards from the Society of Garden Designers.

**OPENING TIMES**

Follers Manor, Alfriston, BN26 5TT  
For NGS: Saturday 4, Sunday 5 July (2-5.30pm)  
Admission £5, children free  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

**11 Gravetye Manor**  
Considered amongst the most influential gardens in English gardening history as it was home for 50 years to William Robinson (1838-1935), influential professional gardener and author renowned for his then revolutionary naturalistic style. Gravetye Manor is now a 'Relais et Chateaux' Hotel and Restaurant. Hotel guests and diners can enjoy the wonderful landscape or eat out in the gardens, and the gardens will be open for one day in August through the National Gardens Scheme. Make sure this is one on your list.

**OPENING TIMES**

Gravetye Manor, West Hoathly, RH19 4LJ  
[www.gravetyemanor.co.uk](http://www.gravetyemanor.co.uk)  
Tel: 01342 810567  
For NGS: Saturday 15 August (2-5pm)  
Admission £20 including tea and homemade cake  
Pre-booking essential. For tickets phone 01483 211535  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

**12 Great Dixter**  
An iconic garden that has led trends with its experimental combinations and continues to evolve. Originally designed by Lutyens and Nathaniel Lloyd, whose son Christopher, a renowned gardener and gardening writer, officiated over these gardens for 55 years, creating a world famous garden that is a place of pilgrimage for garden-lovers. The legacy is now carried on by Fergus Garrett and his team through the Great Dixter Charitable Trust.

Visitors are drawn to the long border and exotic garden with its bright and daring colours, the fanciful topiary, wildflower meadow and the adjoining nursery.

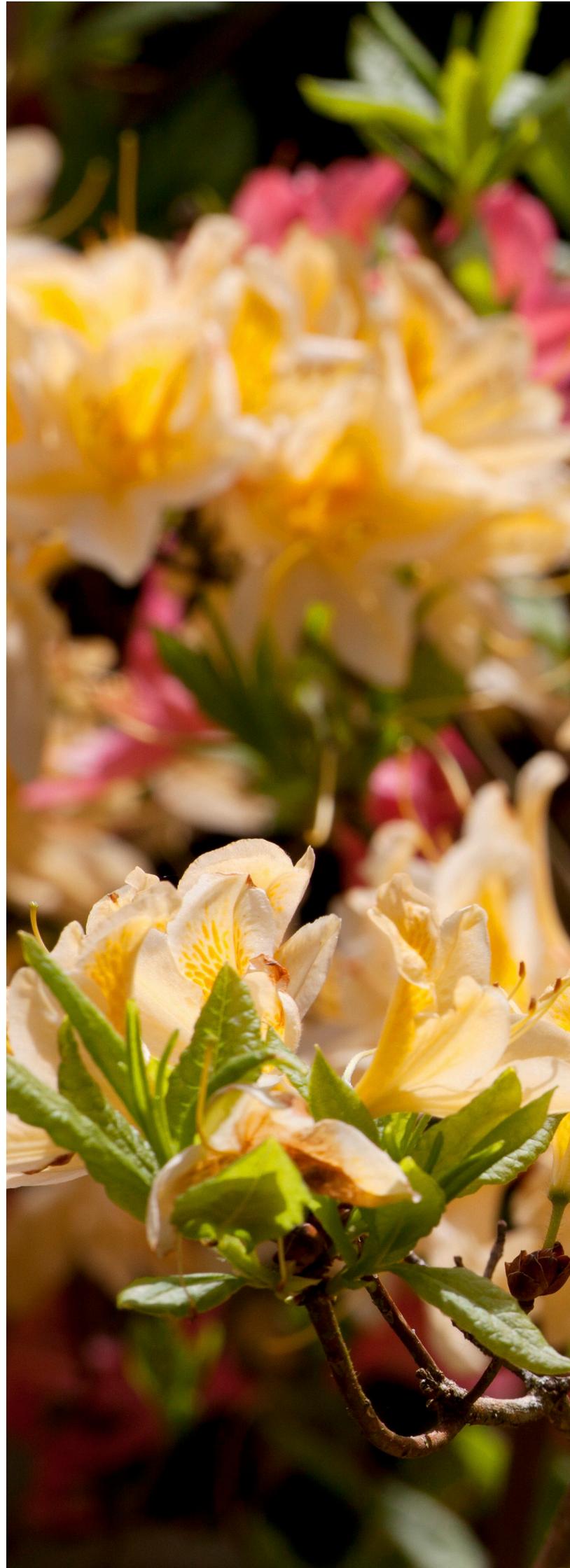
**OPENING TIMES**

Great Dixter, Northiam, TN31 6PH  
28 March to 25 October, Tuesday to Sunday and bank holiday Mondays (garden 11am-5pm, house 2-5pm)  
Admission to garden £8.80, children £2.75  
House and garden £11, £3.85  
[www.greatdixter.co.uk](http://www.greatdixter.co.uk)

**13 Great Lywood Farmhouse**  
Terraced levels stretch out from the attractive 17th century Sussex farmhouse, with rolling lawns edged in flowing mixed borders and tranquil grass walks. White wisteria drapes over pergolas, while roses, peonies and groups of alliums draw the eye. A walled kitchen garden and orchard brim with produce and the whole garden has a lovely, welcoming vibe for strolling and relaxing, with seats dotted throughout to take in the vistas.

**OPENING TIMES**

Great Lywood Farmhouse, Ardingly, RH17 6SW  
For NGS: Sunday 31 May, Friday 5, Sunday 7 June (2-6pm)  
Admission £5, children free  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)



## 14 High Beeches

Twenty five acres of listed, historic landscaped woodland and water gardens. Take a stroll through shimmering azaleas and rhododendrons, at their peak now in spring, ancient flower meadows in summer and a blaze of foliage colours in autumn. The garden also holds a National Collection of Stewartia. There are plenty of benches placed to take in the views and a tearoom to complete your visit.

### Opening times

High Beeches, Handcross, RH17 6HQ

29 March to 2 November, daily except Wednesdays (1-5pm)

Admission £7.70, children free

[www.highbeeches.com](http://www.highbeeches.com)



## 15 King John's Lodge

Jill Cunningham's romantic four-acre garden blends seamlessly with her picturesque historic, listed house. A rambling wild garden with ancient apple trees contrasts with more formal rose and herbaceous borders closer to the house. There is a secret garden to discover and arbours with old-fashioned roses to fill the senses. A rustic bridge leads to a shady ivy garden and a long formal rill, with stepping stones, separates the garden from the fields beyond that are dotted with grazing sheep and offer a further four acres to stroll in. Take time to sit and soak up the ethereal, timeless nature of this garden. Don't forget to visit Jill's son Harry's

adjacent nursery with its lovely selection of plants and assortment of antique collectables and Aladdin's cave gifts, tools and other gardening goods.

**OPENING TIMES**  
King John's Nursery and Garden, Sheepstreet Lane, Etchingham, TN19 7AZ garden, B&B and nursery [www.kingjohnsnursery.co.uk](http://www.kingjohnsnursery.co.uk)  
April-October (10am-5pm) (closed Tuesdays)  
Nov-March (10am-4pm) (closed Tuesdays)  
Closed January and February.  
Admission £4.50, children free.  
For The National Gardens Scheme:  
Sunday 24, Monday 25 May;  
Saturday 20 June (2-5pm);  
Sunday 21 June (11am-5pm);  
Sunday 20 September (2-5pm)



**16 Lowder Mill**  
 Three-acre garden set picturesquely around a 17th century former mill house. It was restored with the help of renowned garden designer Bunny Guinness and owners Anne and John Denning have enthusiastically transformed the site. Visitors enjoy the streams, waterfalls, pretty courtyard adorned with seasonal containers, quirky planting by the potting shed and raised vegetable beds, as well as the glorious homemade teas served overlooking the mill lake where you may also spot the resident kingfishers.

**OPENING TIMES**  
 Lowder Mill, Fernhurst, GU27 3DJ  
 For NGS: Saturday 30 May (11am-5.30pm), Sunday 31 May (10.30am-5.30pm)  
 Admission £3.50, children £1.50  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)  
 Groups also welcome by arrangement close to opening dates  
[anne@denningconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:anne@denningconsultancy.co.uk)

**17 Malthouse Farm**  
 The now mature gardens have been created since 2001 by Helen and Richard Keys and offer a series of garden 'rooms' to discover. In high summer the scene is one of textural, colourful combinations, in both ornamental and productive areas, with a lovely sense of light and movement. The decorative potager, with neat raised beds brimming with tasty produce, is a highlight as are the deep, textural borders of dahlias, sunflowers and ornamental grasses that slope gently down to the wilder meadow area.

**OPENING TIMES**  
 Malthouse Farm, Streat, BN6 8SA  
 Sunday 16, Tuesday 18 August (2-5.30pm)  
 Admission £4, children free, £8 including tea, coffee and cake  
 Visitors also welcome by arrangement April - September  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

**18 Merrimants**  
 Four-acre display garden adjacent to popular garden centre. Imaginative plantings with colourful combinations ensure eye-catching displays from spring to autumn. Deep, sweeping borders edge verdant lawns, a striking Oriental bridge spans two ponds, a scree garden offers ideas for dry areas, wildflowers carpet the ground under a stand of silver birch and there is a new grass garden with jewel-like highlights of vibrant perennials. Complete your visit with a charming vintage tea in the garden centre's restaurant.

**OPENING TIMES**  
 Merrimants, Hurst Green, TN19 7RA  
 Daily (10am-5pm) until 18 October  
 Admission £7, children free  
[www.merrimants.co.uk](http://www.merrimants.co.uk)

**19 Nymans**  
 National Trust garden of great charm and considered one of the greatest 20th century examples in the UK. It was started in 1890 by one of the great plant-hunter sponsors, Ludwig Messel, and continues the tradition with its fine collection of rare plants. Year round interest is provided through shrubs, trees, bulbs, perennials and bedding in a picturesque setting. Described as "both a horticulturalist's dream and a peaceful country garden".

**OPENING TIMES**  
 Nymans, Handcross, RH17 6EB  
 All year, daily (10am-5pm)  
 Admission £11.60, children £6.50  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)





## 21 Ringmer Park

Owners Michael and Deborah Bedford aptly describe their six-acre garden as "a formal garden with soft edges". Developed over 20 years with great care, there is a succession of flowering from spring bulbs, followed by an enchanting rose-filled scene, through to bold blocks of late summer and autumn colour, with the wonderful panoramic backdrop of the folds of the South Downs. In summer, highlights include roses and clematis mingling, tumbling and entwining a pergola tunnel that is bordered by blowsy peonies, densely-planted double herbaceous borders and a formal rose garden with hybrid tea and floribunda varieties. As the roses fade, a hot garden takes over the show with vibrant golds, oranges and reds from exotics such as towering cannas, dahlias and daturas.

### OPENING TIMES

Ringmer Park, Ringmer, BN8 5RW

For NGS: Sunday 24 May, Sunday 13 Sept (2-5pm)

Admission £5, children free

[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)



## 20 Pashley Manor

Quintessentially English gardens set out from an elegant Georgian house with timber-framed Tudor façade. Romantic in style, with beautiful plantings through the season. James and Angela Sellick have been opening their garden to the public since 1992, following restoration of the garden guided by landscape architect Anthony du Gard Pasley. The scene changes from drifts of thousands of tulips and spring blossom to the vibrant tones of the hot border in late summer and autumn. Throughout the year there are special events that include the Tulip Festival, and Sculpture in Particular, as well as Rose and Kitchen Garden weekends. This is a garden to spend time in and to inspire ideas, and don't forget the fabulous homemade food, much of which is sourced from their abundant kitchen garden, and warm



hospitality at their unsurpassed café - if you can find a better garden cafe do let us know!

### OPENING TIMES

Pashley Manor, Ticehurst, TN5 7HE

Gardens, shop, cafe

1 April - 30 September (11am-5pm)

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursday, Fridays,

Saturdays, Bank Holiday Mondays and special events days

Limited opening (garden only) in October, weekdays (10am-3pm)

Admission £9.50, children under six free

See website for special events

Tulip Festival 22 April - 4 May

[www.pashleymanorgardens.com](http://www.pashleymanorgardens.com)



## 22 Sandhill Farm House

Home of author and Principal of The English Gardening School Rosemary Alexander, the garden is a series of masterfully planted areas of glorious combinations within a framework of clipped forms. In the front garden there is a small woodland with soft-toned spring blossom and bloom, a Mediterranean-style terrace and a more formal white garden. The rear garden includes mirrored borders, a decorative potager and a red-themed bed.

### OPENING TIMES

Sandhill Farmhouse, Rogate, GU31 5HU  
 Saturday 20, Sunday 21 June (2-5pm)  
 Admission £3.50, children free  
 Visitors also welcome by arrangement  
 March to September for groups 10+  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)



## 23 Stonehealed Farm

One-and-a-half acre garden, backed by fields, around a 17th century house. Designed to be enjoyed for al fresco dining and relaxing, with wonderful informal and more structural planting displays. There is much to see, including seasonal containers, a tree platform seating area, an intriguing serpentine wooden bridge over the pond, and hot and cool themed borders .

### OPENING TIMES

Stonehealed Farm, Streat, BN6 8SA  
 For NGS: Sunday 17 May (2-5.30pm)  
 Admission £4, children free  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)



## 24 Town Place

Handsome three-acre garden with more than 600 roses, climber-clad pergolas, a stately avenue of lollipop topiary, a 150ft long herbaceous border backed with a tapestry hedge, a walled herb garden, an orchard and a potager with cut flowers. Developed since 1990 with garden areas around a central lawn, this elegant garden is lovely to visit in early to mid summer when the mostly English roses are at their peak, including varieties such as Albertine, Chaplin's Pink and American Pillar in the sunken garden.

### OPENING TIMES

Town Place, Freshfield, RH17 7NR  
 For NGS: Sunday 14, Thursday 18, Sunday 28 June, Sunday 5 July (2-6pm)  
 Admission £5, children free  
[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)



## 25 West Dean

Grade II-listed historic garden in tranquil downland setting, under the expert guidance of managers Sarah and Jim Wain. The 35 acres include a 300ft Edwardian pergola designed by Harold Peto, mixed borders, rustic summerhouses, spring and water gardens, a sunken garden and the fabulous Victorian walled kitchen garden with decorative rows of produce, fruit trees and 13 glasshouses with tender exotics. Special events are held through the year, including Grow Cook Eat, Chilli Fiesta and Apple Affair.

### OPENING TIMES

West Dean Gardens, West Dean, PO18 ORX  
 Daily Feb to 21 Dec (10.30am-5pm)  
 Admission £8.25, £9.10 gift aid, children free  
[www.westdean.org.uk](http://www.westdean.org.uk)

## Something extra

Leigh offers bespoke garden tours for one to three people, visiting gardens tailored to their interests. You will have the opportunity to visit gardens out of the opening times, in some of the gardens have an exclusive visit, meet the owners, wander with them around the garden and take high tea, a treat not to be missed as you chat and share experiences with a fellow keen gardener.

Contact Leigh on 01342 825879 or email [leighclapp@hotmail.com](mailto:leighclapp@hotmail.com)