



# Sunlight & roses

If that great British classic, the rose, is your passion, you will discover an enticing array of them thriving in Borde Hill Garden's clay soil in West Sussex

PHOTOGRAPHS DEREK ST ROMAINE WORDS CHARLES QUESTRITSON

**B**orde Hill's rose garden is a model of its kind. You will seldom encounter anything so beautiful and satisfying as its colours and scents in June and July. The rose bushes are bursting with good growth - healthy, lush and profuse. The design, the setting, the backdrop of ancient walls and hedges - all is as close to perfection as possible. Summer in England at its best.

So it comes as a surprise to discover that Borde Hill, near Haywards Heath in Sussex, has principally been known for more than 100 years

for its collection of rhododendrons and Asiatic trees. Botanists rate Borde Hill as unsurpassed among privately owned gardens in England for the diversity of its rare trees.

But the trouble with many gardens that rely overmuch on rhododendrons is that there is not much left to see when visitors peak in summer. This explains the major change of gear at Borde Hill in the 1990s, when Andrewjohn and Eleni Stephenson Clarke inherited the estate, and started to transform the Sussex-style woodland.

Eleni had the brilliant idea of planting a rose garden that would extend the horticultural

interest beyond the rhododendrons. It is just one of a series of inventive schemes that have brought new investment, new life and new enjoyment to this remarkable garden, including a prize-winning restaurant. Eleni commissioned Robin Williams to design the rose garden, and he turned an odd-shaped piece of the old rose and herbaceous garden into a strong, compelling structure that shows off the roses brilliantly. The Stephenson Clarks named this masterpiece 'Jay Robin's Rose Garden' for their daughter.

The first view of the rose garden is unforgettable. Turn the corner and there it ►

stands, opening out immediately, with the mansion's many brick chimneys as a bristling backdrop. At the centre is a small fountain in a low pool, made from the same bricks as the central path, but all encircled by box edging, to soften its outline. This in turn is surrounded by handsome catmint *Nepeta x faassenii*. Within the rose garden itself, grass paths radiate out from the middle. *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Loddon Blue' lines the long, main, diagonal axis of the garden. Chosen because it is compact and low-growing, it is in scale with the other plantings here.

The rose beds are edged with low box hedges, with larger bobbles of box at the corners. Small ornamental trees give height at the centre of each bed: *Prunus serrula*, *Malus sargentii* and *Amelanchier lamarckii*. In the background are ancient yews cut into castellations, and established trees such as *Koelreuteria paniculata* and *Maackia amurensis*. Along one side are climbing roses trained along rope swags; in one corner lies a sundial,

surrounded by a great pink curving swathe of the polyantha rose 'The Fairy'.

The rich clay soil is perfect for rose-growing. Beds are irrigated and raised up above the level of the paths by an annual dressing of mushroom compost. The head gardener Andy Stevens came from Leonardslee, perhaps the greatest of Sussex's rhododendron gardens (now - alas - no longer open to the public). Andy is a firm believer in good cultivation. 'We're often asked why our

**'We are asked why our roses look so healthy... we concentrate on feeding, watering and deadheading'**

roses look so healthy,' he says, 'but we spray them as little as possible. We concentrate instead on feeding them properly, watering from the estate water supply in dry periods and dead-heading to obtain well-balanced growth. Happy plants are more resistant to pests and diseases.'

Once you get down to looking at the individual roses, you'll find a splendid mix of varieties, old and new; though the once-

flowerers are gradually being replaced by repeaters. David Austin's 'English' roses are the dominant theme - there are more than 100 varieties - and, unlike the old-fashioned roses that they resemble so closely, they flower again and again, often putting on their best performance in early autumn. David Austin bred them to combine the beauty, shape and scent of old roses with the floriferousness and repeat-flowering habit of floribunda roses.

Eleni was one of the first to discern their merit as the mainstay of a dedicated garden of roses. Many of the cultivars she planted here

in the 1990s are still the best.

There are no herbaceous underplantings within the rose garden itself, though the lush plantings of the adjacent herbaceous borders provide interest in all seasons. It is clear that thickly planted roses make their own groundcover, and that dense planting also intensifies their colours. Most of the roses, ancient and modern, run from palest pink to ▶

**PREVIOUS PAGE** The mansion's bristling chimneys are a dramatic backdrop to the rose garden. **BELOW** *Nepeta faassenii* and *Rosa Cottage Rose* create a cloud of pastel beauty. **OPPOSITE** Pink *Rosa* Pretty Jessica the foreground and *R. Mary Rose* behind shimmer in the soft evening light.





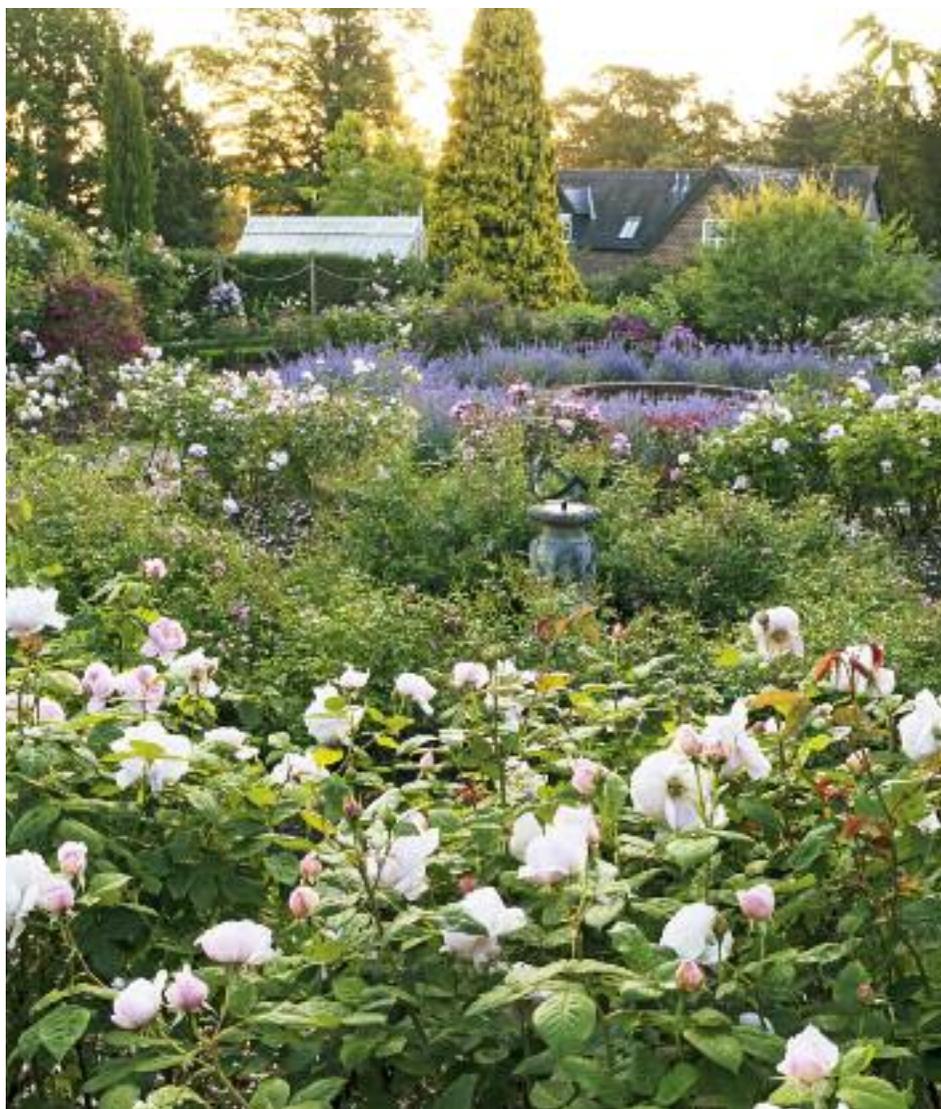
Rose  
Mary Rose

# GLORIOUS GARDENS

WEST SUSSEX



**ABOVE LEFT** The archway to the Mediterranean garden is hung with rambling roses. **ABOVE RIGHT** Irises and sculpture show there's more than roses on offer here. **BELOW** A romantic view.



crimson and are colour-graded within the beds for maximum effect. The darker sections have David Austin's cherry-red Noble Antony and darkest crimson Tradescant. Among the rose-coloured varieties are deep pink Cottage Rose; Evelyn (with a hint of apricot and mother-of-pearl in its colouring); the pale pink Mary Rose; and cabbage-shaped Heritage. The yellow sector is dominated by Jayne Austin, Graham Thomas (named for the guru of old roses) and Crocus Rose, a very bushy shrub that is one of Austin's best. But there are real old-fashioned roses among them too, including pink 'Marchesa Boccella' and crimson 'De Resht', with modern shrubs such as Pearl Drift and 'Sally Holmes' in the white segments.

Here, Italian cypresses peep over the wall. Pass under the trellised bower, painted pale blue - a colour echoed by the elegant wooden pyramids in the herbaceous borders - and into the adjoining Mediterranean garden. In behind is a collection of brand new 'gold standard roses' that have recently won awards from the British Association of Rose Breeders. Eleni would like to show off their merits in mixed borders, as good design and colour-grouping are the making of any garden - and Borde Hill's rose garden has both of these in super abundance.

*Borde Hill, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 1XP. Open from 21 March to 11 September daily, and October mid-term; 10am - 6pm, with the last admission at 5pm. There is a rose masterclass with Michael Marriot from David Austin on 8 June. Tel: +44 (0)1444 450326. [www.bordehill.co.uk](http://www.bordehill.co.uk)*

# The notebook

**Borde Hill Garden** is known for its collection of rhododendrons and trees, and its rose garden, which is sheltered and faces south. The soil is clay, perfect for growing roses

## SPIKY BRIGHT

The burgundy-red stems of *Rosa sericea* subsp. *omeiensis* f. *pteracantha* stand out against the lush green foliage, adding a striking and sculptural element to the border (right).



## DAINTY SCULPTURE

The various sculptures placed throughout the garden (above) add a touch of femininity and create focal points in an already very graceful and well-structured plot.

## STRONG SUPPORTS

Rambling and climbing roses need sturdy supporting structures (below). When you tie them in, make sure you don't do so too tightly to avoid causing damage to the stems. Check ties every few months and loosen if necessary.



## PERFECT PARTNER

The late Graham Stuart Thomas, revered garden designer and rose expert, advocated the use of catmint - here *Nepeta x faassenii* (left) - as a partner for old-fashioned roses. Its lavender-blue flowers look particularly gorgeous accompanied by roses, particularly white and pink varieties.



## ANDY STEVENS' ROSE TIPS

- **Feed roses regularly**, but don't overdo it. Giving a small amount of feed regularly is better than overdoing it every now and then.
- **If your soil is very sandy** or free draining, give your roses a good soak two or three times a week when it's hot. Mulching with well-rotted organic matter is also beneficial.
- **Invest in the best-quality** pruning equipment (secateurs, loppers and pruning saw), and always clean your tools after you have used them to avoid spreading disease.
- **Make sure you have** a good pair of gardening gloves, strong enough to protect you from rose thorns.

## CONTACTS

### OTHER ROSE GARDENS TO VISIT NEARBY

- **Nymans**, Handcross, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 6EB. Tel: +44 (0)1444 405250. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)
  - **Pashley Manor Gardens**, Ticehurst, East Sussex TN5 7HE. Tel: +44 (0)1580 200888. [www.pashleymanorgardens.com](http://www.pashleymanorgardens.com)
- ### RECOMMENDED ROSE NURSERIES
- **Country Garden Roses**, Hadnall, Shropshire SY4 3DH. Tel: +44 (0)1939 210380. [www.countrygardenroses.co.uk](http://www.countrygardenroses.co.uk)
  - **David Austin Roses**, Bowling Green Lane, Albrighton, Wolverhampton, Shropshire WV7 3HB. Tel: +44 (0)1902 376300. [www.davidaustinroses.com](http://www.davidaustinroses.com)
  - **Peter Beales Roses**, London Road, Attleborough, Norfolk NR17 1AY. Tel: +44 (0)1953 454707. [www.classicroses.co.uk](http://www.classicroses.co.uk)