



Water features add to the attractions of Hole Park.

Summer's final fling

As the summer draws to a close, we pick the best gardens in Kent to witness the last splash of colour

Words by Caroline Edmunds pictures by Darryl Curcher



Exotic or tropical planting in Kent's gardens can often provide a splash of colour at the end of the summer, with cannas, dahlias and salvias always among the most popular.

Many of the county's gardens also have some wonderful statues and sculptures, further adding to the exotic feel of these open spaces.

Britain's Finest Gardens feature over 300 special gardens to visit throughout Britain, selected by *The Times* gardener and broadcaster Stephen Anderton and listing Marie

Place Gardens, Groombridge Place, Leeds Castle and Godinton House in Kent as the finest sculpture gardens in the county.

Godinton House and Gardens are perhaps the least well known, but are still impressive, and are set in a beautiful 18th-century landscaped park with views across the surrounding countryside.

The formal gardens include terraced lawns, topiary, formal pond, rose garden and herbaceous borders, enclosed by a vast yew hedge and ornamented with impressive statues

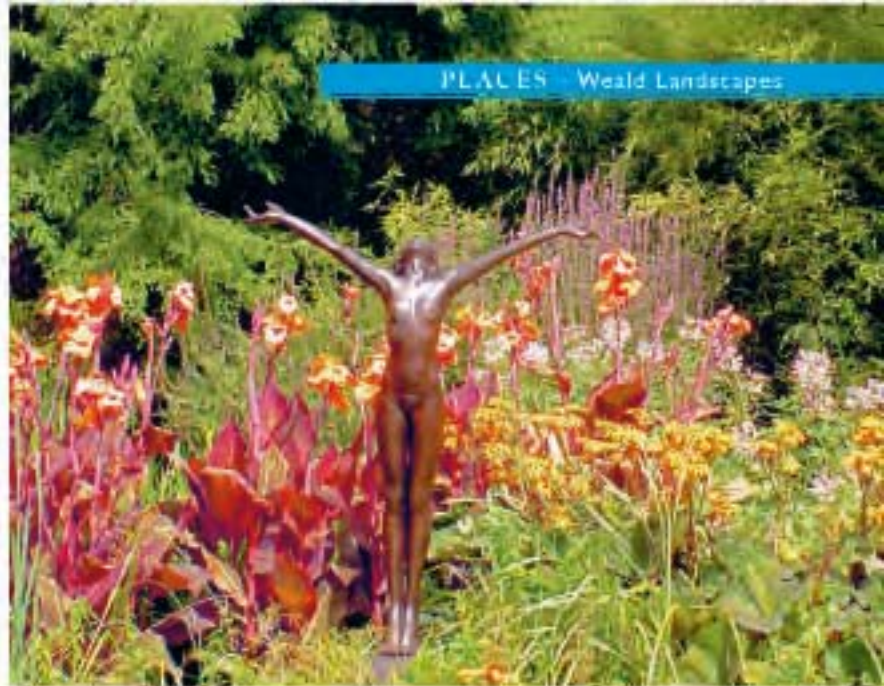
too. A small walled Italian garden with central fountain and scented Mediterranean planting also makes a peaceful haven looking out over the wild garden.

The herbaceous borders at one of the Seven Wonders of the Weald, Marie Place Gardens in Brenchley, are ablaze with colour at this time of year with late-flowering shrubs and perennials adding interest from every corner.

The orchids in the restored Victorian glass houses are well worth a visit and offer a varied and colourful display throughout the season. A



Above: The Slayer statue at Hole Park in Rolvenden
Below: Italian Garden at Hever Castle



A classic example of exotic planting and sculpture at Borden Hill

Fountains, springs and large ponds typify the tradition of the English country house

sculpture show also takes place this month (10 to 24 Sep), adding a contemporary feel to the gardens as over 40 sculptors use metal, marble, wood and glass to create their masterpieces.

Visitors can also enjoy the many permanent sculptures dotted all around these beautiful gardens, including a replica terracotta warrior.

Pashley Manor Gardens in Ticehurst is also worth a mention. This quintessentially English garden surrounds a private Grade I listed timber-framed house which dates from 1550, and offers a blend of romantic landscaping, imaginative plantings and fine old trees.

Fountains, springs and large ponds also help to represent the many eras of English history, and typifying the tradition of the English country house

the gardens also feature sculpture throughout its opening season.

This month Hever Castle has a colourful dahlia border providing a bright addition to Two Sisters Lawn at this childhood home of Anne Boleyn. The trees, especially the Japanese Maples, Beech and other plants with coloured bark, are starting to show their beautiful autumnal colours.

There is also a very pretty arched open air corridor between the lake area and the main castle, which leads up to some amazing statues forming a fountain next to the lake.

The 15-acre garden at Hole Park in Rolvenden has a wonderful sculpture. The Slayer, approached via a long border full of colour late into the year. The water fountains and extensive topiary also form an impressive part of the formal gardens. ■

Opening times

Pashley Manor Gardens

Open until 30 Sept on Tues, Wed, Thurs, Saturday and Bank Holiday Mondays, from 11am to 5pm. Admission: adults £6, children under 16 years £3, children under 10 years free, group rates (20 or more) £3.50

Mark Place Gardens

Open Fri, Sat, Sun and Mon only appointments until 2 Oct between 10am and 5pm. Admission: adults £4.50, senior citizens £4, children aged 4-12 £2.

Hever Castle Gardens

Open daily until 30 Nov. Gardens open at 11am and the castle at 12 noon, with last admission at 4

5.30pm. Final exit on 4-30pm

Admission: adult £9.50, senior citizens £4.25, child (5-14) £5.50. Godstone Gardens Open Thurs to Mon, 2pm to 5.30pm until 29 Oct.

Godstone House

Admission: adult £3, children go free. House: adult £6, children go free.

Hole Park Gardens

is open Wed and Thurs until the end of Oct. Admission: adult £4, children 50p

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