



Local gardens to visit

Surveys conducted by VisitScotland suggest that gardens are one of Scotland's top five draws. All within an hour's drive from Errichel (some much closer), six gardens are listed here. If you are looking to visit gardens across Scotland, there is an excellent reference book. Like all reference books, it does need to be revised regularly, (the Explorers garden in Pitlochry is better than it describes), however, the book is a must-have for serious garden hunters. *Scotland for gardeners: the guide to Scottish gardens, nurseries and garden centres*. Kenneth Cox, 2009, Birlinn Ltd.

<http://www.birlinn.co.uk/book/details/Scotland-for-Gardeners-9781841585765/>

Bolfracks Gardens

There has been an ornamental garden here since the mid-18th century. Most of what can be seen today dates from the 1970s. The gardens at Bolfracks are renowned for their impressive collections of rare and unusual plants, including a superb collection of rhododendrons, azaleas, acers, old fashioned roses and an array of herbaceous perennials. The garden faces north with fabulous views over the Tay valley. This plantsman's garden has many interesting features from springtime through to autumn.

In recent years, the garden has undergone major renovations. There are new peony beds where there was a very long herbaceous border. There is a new short and wide herbaceous border at the East End of the lawn. Two huge old beds have been removed and replaced with four smaller, manageable beds with new planting. Throughout the rest of the garden, there have been special plants added to fill gaps and increase interest for the visitor.

The garden is on a steep slope, so it is not suitable for those with mobility issues.

There are a series of footpaths through the pine wood on Kenmore Hill close by and details are available at the entrance.

1st April–31st October.

Entrance: adults £4; children under 16, free.

Visitors are welcome to bring a picnic to enjoy at one of the many tranquil spots in the garden.

Tea only available for groups with a booking.

http://www.bolfracks.com/bolfracks_garden/index.htm

Cluny House Gardens

Explore this magical woodland garden and discover some of Perthshire's most fascinating plants and wildlife.

The garden was created by Bobby and Betty Masterton. When they arrived in the 1950s there were a few trees – conifers, beeches and oak, but more notably the two magnificent Wellingtonias you can see today. One of them is Britain's widest conifer, with a girth of 11 metres. Although over 150 years old, these natives of North America are still youngsters as the trees can live for a thousand years.

The Mastertons had a particular interest in Himalayan plants which thrive in the garden's ideal conditions. Many of the seeds they planted are now large trees, such as the Tibetan cherry, notable for its mahogany peeling bark. Perennials that flourish here include lilies and meconopsis (blue poppy). Since 1987, the garden has been cared for by their daughter Wendy and her husband John Mattingley.

20th February–31st October. 10am–6pm

Entrance: adults £5, children £1. Annual season ticket: £10.

Over the winter, visitors are asked for a donation towards red squirrel and wild bird food.

No refreshments available.

<http://www.clunyhousedgardens.com>

Scone Palace

Once the crowning place of the Kings of Scots, Scone Palace occupies a unique position in the history of Scotland. The Palace itself is worthy of a visit, but a trip would be incomplete without enjoying the Palace grounds. They are as splendid as the Palace itself. Stroll at your leisure through the magnificent Pinetum where, amongst others, giant redwoods and Noble Firs tower over you then on to the New Pinetum of less hardy and decorative conifers. One of the finest trees at Scone is a giant Douglas Fir which was raised from the first seed sent from North America by David Douglas in 1826.

Whilst the gardens and grounds are beautiful throughout the year, there are a number of seasonal highlights. Spring is heralded by the arrival of snowdrops followed by the drifts of daffodils throughout the Grounds. The primulas and bluebells bloom in the woodland areas throughout April and May. In May and June, the Grounds explode with colour from the rhododendrons and azaleas, while the Laburnum Walkway will also dazzle you with its distinctive bright yellow flowers.

The unique Murray Star Maze, designed by the world-renowned maze designer Adrian Fisher, is Perthshire's only maze. Designed in the shape of the five pointed star that features in the Murray family crest, the maze comprises 2,000 beech trees, half copper and half green, planted in a way to create a unique tartan effect.

1 April–31 October 2012. Daily, 9.30am–5.45pm (last admission 5.00pm, Saturdays 4.00pm).
November–March, grounds only. 10.00am–4.00pm.

Entrance: Palace: adults £10, children £7. Grounds only: adults £5.80, children £4.

Scone Palace also has a full range of refreshment services available.

<http://www.scone-palace.co.uk/visitor-information/the-gardens-and-grounds.html>

Explorers, the Scottish Plant Hunters' Garden

While this garden is relatively new and still developing, it is child and visitor friendly. Take a journey around the world following in the footsteps of Scotland's plant hunters. This garden celebrates their lives and their contribution to our gardens today there are flowers and art, architecture and a North American glade. The garden is next to the Pitlochry Festival Theatre where there is a café, plants on sale and a book shop.

Garden tours are led by experienced guides who bring Explorers to life! Lasting approximately one and a half hours, a tour provides insights into the plants, trees, wildlife, history, art and architecture contained in Explorers. Fun, fascinating and informative!

30 March–4 November 2012. Monday to Sunday, 10am–5pm (last entry 4.15pm).

Port-Na-Craig, Pitlochry, PH16 5DR

<http://www.explorersgarden.com>

Garden tours:

April–October. Sundays, 11.30am. Additionally, June–September. Wednesdays, 11.30am.

Price: £5.

Blair Castle Gardens

A peaceful wooded grove, a ruined kirk (Scottish church), a red deer park and a whimsical gothic folly can all be found here. Colourful peacocks roam the grounds, Highland cattle graze in fields nearby and the native red squirrel can often be spotted amongst the branches. Children will also enjoy the castle's woodland adventure playground.

Escape to the walled garden, away from the coach loads of tourists visiting the castle itself. Restored in the 1990s, this nine-acre walled garden includes a Chinese bridge and more than 100 fruit trees and a wide variety of vegetables. The interlocking ponds and the flower beds are spectacular. However, the glory of this garden in summer is the herbaceous borders, which run along the 275m-long south-facing wall.

Diana's Grove, a tranquil wooded area adjacent to the castle affords a unique opportunity to enjoy some of the county's finest and tallest trees in a space of just two acres. It is also the home of a Grand Fir, the UK's second tallest tree at 62.70 metres. Visitors can also enjoy following the new Sculpture Trail through the castle gardens and grounds.

5 November 2011–25 March 2012*

Saturday and Sunday, 10am–4pm (last admission to castle 3pm)

26 March to 26 October 2012

Daily, 9.30am–5.30pm (last admission to castle 4.30pm)

Loch of the Lowes Visitor Centre

Red squirrels are now considered endangered, but here on the reserve families of red squirrels visit feeders, much to the delight of visitors. You'll also be able to see woodland birds such as treecreepers, siskins and great spotted woodpeckers that all make great use of the feeders. Enjoy seeing beautiful waterbirds including wigeon, moorhen to mallards from the observation hides with the help of powerful telescopes. The four-star Visitor Centre provides a place to birdwatch in style and all in the comfort of a cozy centre. Sit back and relax with a cup of fair trade coffee while you marvel at red squirrels playing right in front of you from the viewing window.

1 March–31 October. Daily, 10.30am–5pm.

1 November–29 February. Friday–Sunday only, 10.30am–4pm.

Entrance: adults £3.50, children £0.50 (reduced winter rates)

A923, off A9. 2 miles from Dunkeld, PH8 0HH.

<http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/visit/loch-of-the-lowes/>