As we leave winter behind, camellias bring a welcome splash of colour to National Trust gardens. Introduced from the Far East, camellias have become firm favourites here in the South West, with 450 different varieties on National Trust records. And these spring flowering plants remain popular for very good reason.

Ian Wright, our South West Lead Garden Adviser, says ‘Camellias are such great value. You can get an abundance of flowers from November through to May or even June, and after flowers fade you still have the glossy, dark green leaves creating a perfect backdrop for other plants.

You’ll find camellias in many gardens in the South West at this time of the year, from the walled camellia garden at Greenway to Killerton and Lanhydrock, which has about a thousand camellia plants and more than 220 varieties.

‘My favourite? That’s a tricky one, but I’ll go for the beautiful but unusual two-tone Camellia japonica ‘Lavinia Maggi’ with its cerise stripes.’

Ian’s top camelia tip – even in a small garden you can grow a camellia in a pot, but do use a compost for ericaceous plants as camellias grow well in acidic soils.

Every year National Trust gardeners carry out a Valentine’s Day flower count, giving us an idea of what gardens are going to look like throughout the year, and indicating how spring flowers are affected by climate change. We also want to know what’s blooming in your garden or local park, so keep an eye on social media in the run up to Valentine’s Day to get involved.

Find camellias in National Trust gardens across the South West, and particularly so in these places: Trengwainton, Lanhydrock, Killerton, Greenway, Kingston Lacy, Coleton Fishacre, Cotehele, Knightshayes and Trelissick.
In the footsteps of monks

This year, the historic footpath of Overbeck's is celebrating Japanese plants and gardening. In early spring you're likely to come across Japanese-style style 'kare-sanso' made by the garden team to shelter their more tender plants.

"Haruan" is the Japanese traditional custom of enjoying the transient beauty of flowers, and here we've chosen to celebrate the transient beauty of magnolias - particularly Magnolia campbellii 'Haruan', often in full flower in February.

This year, April, the Japanese magnolias (Magnolia edulis) reach their peak, alongside delicate Japanese maps. In this country we share the Japanese passion for gardening, and in the new arboretum you'll find magnificient displays of Japanese plants to both admire and inspire.

Rooted in Japan

Noticing nature

In 1888, one of the Trust’s founders, Octavia Hill, said ‘...the sight of sky and things of growing, seem human needs, common to all and not to be dispensed with without great loss.’ In today’s world, this acts as a timely reminder to pause, pay attention to the natural world and notice the effect it has on us.

You don’t have to travel abroad to find natural wonders. In our mild, maritime climate there are some of the rarest temperate rainforests in the world. And in these undrained, ancient woodland you’ll discover a miniature world full of wild treasures such as lichens. But this magical world can easily go unnoticed.

But this magical world can easily go unnoticed. Clinging to tree bark or mossy boulders, lichens are an extraordinary partnership between a fungus and algae or re-called ‘cyanobacteria’. They are not only hardy and food for many tiny creatures but also indicators of great air quality. This is all because they absorb moisture and nutrients straight from the atmosphere rather than the soil.

Rooted in Japan

Taking shape

The first phase of the ambitious two-year £2.4 million project to restore and revitalize the 17th-century house at Dyrham Park will be uncovered this spring.

Visitors will be able to see work on location of the South Saloon which has included structural work and decoration to bring back authenticity to the house. New exhibition spaces are also taking shape which will include a tasting kitchen to sample delicious seasonal dishes from the garden.

The work in the house is part of a larger £10 million project across the site to include works to the garden, play area, restaurants, tea-room, carpark and shop. Dyrham Park remains open throughout the spring.

A monumental task

A dilapidated workman’s cottage set in woodland behind Dartmouth Castle has a fresh lease of life.

With glorious views over the Dart estuary, calls from the sea and the forbidding ramparts of Dartmouth Castle, this 1834 cottage is entering a dramatic new stage in its restoration. About eight months of specially trained and experienced scaffolding is now ensuring the 53-metre monument so that the stonework at all heights can be examined and conserved.

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A new life

The main challenge for the project will be to maintain as much of the building’s original features and character as possible while creating a modern, comfortable and extra space.

The team will reveal the roof and extend the building upwards and build a new staircase. Old belongings, doors and windows will be restored. Some original lime plaster was uncovered and left to be worn.

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Memories of Barrington

Four volunteers from Barrington Court have completed a two-year oral history project, with the recordings now being lodged in the British Library Archive. They interviewed people with memories of Barrington going back nearly eighty years.

Back in 2017 Barrington Court staff in Somerset gained a bursary for equipment and training. National Trust former Deputy Chairman, Sir Laurie Magnus, gave money to develop oral history at Trust properties, with training supported by the Oral History Society/ National Life Stories at the British Library. Volunteer Ros Murphy explains, ‘The training taught us how to conduct a good interview, putting people at ease. Asking open-ended questions like: “What was Christmas like?” to encourage memories and talking.’

Together, the interviews create a vivid picture of life at the Court during the sixty years that three generations of the Lyle family were tenants.

Sybil Taylor is the daughter of Charles Newbury, who was Colonel Lyle’s butler. She remembered the young Andrew Lyle locking her father in the pantry; someone drove 50 miles to Bristol to get another key cut.

James Ayres’ father Arthur was an architectural sculptor who worked on the renovation in the 1920s. Probably under 21, he was greeted by Lyle’s architect James Forbes with: ‘You’re a bit young.’

Some interviews have shed light on the development and management of the garden. Others reveal a relaxed and informal lifestyle, and that the Lyles were generous to estate workers - children had free run of the gardens, and families were welcome to swim and play tennis. A big tea-party in 1937 celebrated the coronation of George VI.

The volunteer team of Ros Murphy, Del Wiggins, John Hall and Tricia Thomson is rightly proud that the team’s work will live on in the British Library. Barrington Court now has a wealth of new information to enrich its story.

For the love of books

A shepherd’s hut at Lodge Park, a fish cellar ‘Book Nook’ in Glendurgan Garden, an old ice cream parlour at Watersmeet... over the past year some quirky second-hand book shops have been popping up at National Trust places across the South West.

There are now 50 second-hand book shops in the region, and the number just keeps growing – reflecting people’s love of a good book and browse of a book shop.

Thanks to supporters like you, the book shops take thousands of pounds annually. Last year over £130,000 was raised across the South West. At each location, every penny goes back to looking after that place.

At Lodge Park the books outgrew their shelf in the café and took over a renovated shepherd’s hut, leading to a big increase in sales. All the money raised helps to fund the restoration of the Charles Bridgeman landscape.

Down in the valley garden at Glendurgan, a ‘Book Nook’ has been created in the old fish cellar, which is now run by a team of 40 volunteers. Since opening last year they’ve raised well over £2,000, all of which helps to maintain the unique living maze.

Volunteers are central to the success of these book shops. They manage everything, from sorting through donations, stocking shelves and sharing their love of books with visitors.


‘I was thrilled when this opportunity came up right on my doorstep. What better way to share my passion for books within the countryside I love.’

On a slightly bigger scale, the established second-hand emporium at Trelissick has taken over four rooms, and some real gems have come to light. Dedicated volunteers have unearthed everything from 50 years’ worth of pristine copies of The Beano to a photo album of pre-First World War alpine skiers – depicting women in ankle-length skirts scaling the mountains.

So if you’re having a clear-out do bring in your preloved, good quality books and we’ll find them a new home. Or if you’re looking for a holiday read or following up on a favourite subject then give yourself some time in our second-hand book shops and refuel that passion. Your Handbook shows which places have book shops.

For more information, please call 0344 800 1895 or email sw.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk

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