Little joys to accumulate in 2020

The Vyne (Hants)
The Vyne’s mindfulness trail is designed to encourage a more reflective pace, asking a series of thought-provoking questions as you travel to various points in the gardens. The Simply Be trail takes you to a number of peaceful places in the grounds where you can sit and relax, or walk in peace. (11 Jan - 9 Feb)

Waddesdon (Bucks)
Local wellbeing practitioner Matt Rooiata will lead mindfulness walks around the gardens at Waddesdon. There’s also a dawn chorus event at its aviary in May when visitors can experience the garden before opening when the place is populated by birds rather than people.

Hughenden (Bucks)
Hughenden is holding drop-in activities throughout the spring to connect people with ‘the need to see things growing’. Children will be able to experience being in the garden through all their senses by sowing their own seeds. The rangers are also running guided dawn chorus walks.

Mottisfont (Hants)
At Mottisfont [pictured below], there are spots beloved by staff and volunteers that have a particularly soothing and restorative quality. A new mindfulness map shares these special places, encouraging you to slow down and take in the view. (13 Jan-29 Feb).

‘The need of air, the sight of sky and of things growing’

This year is the 125th anniversary of the National Trust. For 125 years, each generation has come together to look after the nation’s special places, for everyone.

For our founders, it was how beautiful green spaces benefited people that was key. As Octavia Hill put it in 1888: ‘The need of quiet, the need of air, the need of exercise and, I believe, the sight of sky and of things growing, seem human needs, common to all and not to be dispensed with without great loss.’

In our increasingly busy, increasingly urbanised, increasingly digital world, these founding principles feel even more relevant today. Who doesn't feel instantly energised after stepping out of centrally-heated fugu into the brittle sunshine and crisp air of a winter’s day?

The sight of a duckling waddling after its mother evokes tender emotions. Catching an unexpected shower of fragrant spring blossom can spark a moment of unbridled joy. The relief and satisfaction of heaving reluctant legs to the top of a hill for a glorious view is air-punchingly good. We all need it. Put simply, everyone needs nature.

This year, our places are all planning more ways to help us experience nature and those little joys that accumulate into a healthier, happier you. Look out for wellness gardens, dawn chorus walks, chatty cafés, community planting days, star-gazing, yoga and tai chi in the gardens.

In our region, one of the anniversary celebrations is a wave of song, lighting up like beacons across the region. An anthem is being commissioned with lyrics provided by National Trust supporters to be sung by community choirs on Saturday 16 May.

The wave of song will start at Alfriston Clergy House in East Sussex, the first built property to be acquired by the National Trust in 1896. When the song has been sung there, the baton will be taken up by another property, and so on, finishing at Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire.

See What’s On for details of participating places and how to get involved.
2020 begins with a brand new way to enjoy your National Trust membership in London. The National Trust Partners scheme is expanding. From January, the Royal Observatory joins the 12 existing places where members can receive a discount on entry. Overlooking the River Thames, the Royal Observatory is best known for the major role it played in the history of astronomy, navigation and even time itself, as the home of GMT (Greenwich Mean Time).

As spring arrives, a seasonal transformation begins at our places across London. In the 300 year-old orchard at Fenton House, a delicate display of ‘pom-pom’ blossoms dangle gently from branches while a blaze of blue tulips add a splash of colour on the ground. 500,000 bulbs burst through the hot summer of 2018, but this year has been kinder to our favourites.

Carpeting the slopes and verges around the formal gardens are many thousands of naturalised narcissi. Last year many of them were ‘blind’, meaning they sent up leaves as normal, but no flowers. Matthew explains: ‘This was most likely due to the hot summer of 2018, but this year has been kinder to our daffodils and we hope that the ‘rest’ year will help them put on an impressive display in 2020.

Spring also sees a new ‘garden room’ at Red House beginning to take shape. A re-imagining of the planting vision of William Morris and Philip Webb, this new space brings the indoors out. Co-created with the community, the garden room also features commissions by contemporary designers.

For more information on the above and other news from London head to nationaltrust.org.uk/london

New Stowdrops route

A trip to see Stowe’s snowdrops is an essential winter pilgrimage for many. Stowe is one of the best places to see carpets of the delicate bell-shaped flowers nestling in the folds of the frosty landscape.

This year, there’s a new map and route to follow in Stowedrop season. New paths are being opened to explore formerly hidden areas of the garden where snowdrops blanket the banks between Lamport Garden and the Gothic Temple. The new route also takes in the best winter views that are revealed after the leaves have fallen.

Snowdrops are not the only iconic flower to find en masse in the garden. After big community bulb planting efforts in March to showcase a two-month show of narcissi. The two horticultural displays, curated by Cliveden’s garden team, will change throughout March and April as early daffodils are replaced by mid- and late-season varieties.

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From January, narcissi fans will be able to purchase eight different varieties grown in Cliveden’s nursery from the gift shop.

New art in the Chapel

Sandham Memorial Chapel hosts three, very different, exhibitions this spring, each one inspired by Stanley Spencer’s famous paintings. Saturated Space (11 - 29 March) which showcases the distinguished history of contemporary British cartooning. You’ll come across plenty of topical characters, including Boris Johnson and Donald Trump, in a show that explores social and political preoccupations that have gripped the nation. Humour is at its heart, with funny, beautifully drawn works from the likes of Matt of the Telegraph, Mike Williams of Private Eye, and Ronald Searle.

Equally thought-provoking is the third exhibition in the series Faces of Change (2 May - 5 July), a partnership between the National Trust and National Portrait Gallery. It explores the ways in which migration has shaped our national identity and culture for centuries. Through a diverse selection of portraits from the National Portrait Gallery’s Collection, you’ll encounter the personal stories and rich contributions of people who have made the UK their home, from the sixteenth century to today.

Elsewhere at Mottisfont, beautiful multi-media installations take you on journeys into the past. Casting Light [below] by Heinrich & Palmer (Red Room) uses light, 3-D laser scanners, video projection and sound to peel back 800 years of architecture. Inspired by Mottisfont’s heritage as a place of pilgrimage, sonic artist Hywel Davies has created Pilgrim - a sound experience in the Beech Circle and Gardener’s Cottage combining Japanese percussion, bass-baritone voice, and intimate accounts of personal journeys. From May in the Cellarium, Surface Tensions by Simon Ryder uses virtual reality to explore Mottisfont’s relationship with the famous river Test.

An interactive exhibition based on the much-loved children’s book The Tiger Who Came to Tea arrives at Osterley Park on 11 January. With it comes the chance to play with a life-size tiger, delve into a dressing-up chest or make ‘tea’ in a fully interactive play kitchen. Bigger kids will also be able to explore Judith Kerr’s wider life and work, including access to childhood drawings that show how she developed into an acclaimed artist and storyteller.

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Later, fragrant hyacinths and narcissi litter carpet the riverside path at Mottisfont too. Snakeshead fritillaries in spring. Snowdrops complemented by cyclamen and then Stowe is famous for its ‘Stowedrop’ season, a frosty day.

Cliveden’s Water Garden is sculptural on the West Bank Garden scent the icy air Hughenden’s winter-flowering shrubs in February at Mottisfont. There are thousands of yellow nodding heads in The Vyne’s walled garden and at Osterley to be outshone by the daffodils taking centre stage as we move into March. Pale, lemon-coloured Primroses brave the chill of February at Hughenden and Osterley to be outshone by the daffodils taking centre stage as we move into March. There are thousands of yellow nodding heads in The Vyne’s walled garden and at Cliveden, where rare narcissi are celebrated in horticultural displays. At Ham House, half a million bulbs create a spring flowering sequence of early purple crocus, romantic pastel-coloured tulips and vivid muscari in an intense drift of colour.

Tulips are the order of the day at Hinton Ampner. Look out for frilly candy-pink Ten Bosch in the Sunken Garden, and in the Kitchen Garden tangerine-pink Dordogne.

Fluffy blossom is a wonderful sight in the orchards at Fenton House, Stowe, Hughenden, The Vyne, Greys Court, Sandham Memorial Chapel and Mottistone Gardens on the Isle of Wight. Mottistone Gardens opens seven days a week for the very first time from 7 March.

Not all gardens sleep in winter. It can be a wonderful time of year to observe birds singing. This is taking the notion to its extreme, but sometimes in our human desire to categorise and make sense of the natural world, we can forget it’s OK to simply notice our surroundings and enjoy the way they make us feel.

A murmuration of starlings pulsing and swirling in a rolling, complex pattern at dusk is no less of a spectacle for knowing the collective term. The ghostly form of a barn owl flashing by on silent wings at dusk is no less of a spectacle for knowing the collective term. The ghostly form of a barn owl flashing by on silent wings at dusk is no less of a spectacle for knowing the collective term.

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Conservation in action

Coleshill parkland plans

After more than 60 years of slumber, plans are afoot to bring the sleeping beauty of Coleshill back to life.

Four hundred acres of parkland in the charming Oxfordshire village are returning to National Trust management. Part of the wider Buscot and Coleshill estates, this historic but largely forgotten landscape was once the setting for one of the great houses in England - Coleshill House. In 1952, before the estate came into the care of the National Trust, and just as restoration work was coming to an end, the 17th century manor was tragically destroyed by fire.

The house and formal gardens may be long gone, but the panoramic contours of the parkland are rich with history and wildlife. From the cool dark corridors of the Long Shrubbery, the parkland sweeps down to the flood meadows of the river Cole. Riverbank restoration is planned to recreate the river meadows with habitats for otters, voles, wild flowers and nesting birds.

Fencing will be removed and the arable field will be allowed to revert to wooded pasture and wildflower meadows, opening up the landscape for conservation grazing and public access. With the help of donations and volunteers, there are plans to find lost paths, follies and features, restore the ha-ha and conserve the old pet cemetery.

For details of how to donate, get involved or find walks that cross the parkland, please visit the Buscot and Coleshill website.

The Vyne bridge

In 1986, The Vyne’s Victorian cast iron bridge collapsed in severe storms. Built in the mid-nineteenth century on the foundations of an earlier bridge, it spanned The Vyne’s magnificent lake, and would have provided unique views of the landscaped gardens and wider estate.

With The Vyne’s £5.4 million roof project now complete, ambitious plans are underway to reintestate this long lost and attractive piece of architectural heritage. We need to raise £50,000 in order to literally build a bridge into The Vyne’s Victorian past. William Wiggett Chute invested time and money into the restoration of The Vyne and this would reintestate an important part of his legacy.

If you stroll along the lake’s edge today, you can still see the crumbling foundations of the old bridge jutting dejectedly out of the water. To retain the historic integrity of the new bridge as much as possible, we’re hoping to incorporate sections of the original cast iron railings into the design.

Curbridge new wood

Centuries-old Hampshire bluebell woods feeling the impact of encroaching urban development and recreational pressure have been given a lifetime. An £85,000 donation from SC Johnson has funded a new 10-acre native wood at Curbridge National Nature Reserve on the banks of the river Hamble. The recently planted trees, including wild service and field maple, oak, lime and cherry, will take pressure off the reserve’s veteran woodland, fragile from soil erosion and compaction, and unable to regenerate naturally away from the estuary’s edge.

New rides and glades will provide open areas for wildflowers and grasses, creating vital habitats for bats, butterflies, dormice and other endangered wildlife at Curbridge – a reserve with international levels of protection. There’s a pond too, and a path network that allows the local community and other visitors to walk and play in the heart of this green oasis, as it matures into a lasting legacy for wildlife.

Meet like-minded members

If you like making the most of your National Trust membership and enjoy some company on your outings, why not join your local Supporter Group? These are groups of Trust members who live near you and get together for talks, walks, outings, day trips and even holidays.

Wherever you live, there’s a group within reach, waiting to give you a warm welcome.

Search supporter groups LSE on the National Trust website or phone Viv Tobitt, Supporter Groups Co-ordinator on 01932 339496.

Chastleton garden restoration

You wouldn’t become a gardener if you liked a quick fix. Chastleton’s Garden Management Plan is 25 years old and it’s only now that its longer-term vision is coming to fruition with the Wilderness Walk and the Best Garden restoration projects.

The Wilderness Walk was created in response to rainy months in autumn and spring when the garden sometimes had to close. This was to preserve both visitors and grassy paths from the damaging effects of slippery mud. Thanks to a blurry, historic photo, the garden team knew that a hard-standing path had once existed.

Head Gardener Ross Sutton explains: ‘The volunteers and myself went hunting for a path down the West side of the gardens. With pointing sticks in hand we started scraping back the turf which had consumed it 20 years before. We managed to expose a hard path which lead down to the wilderness, a beautiful tree-lined walk which is filled with snowdrops in the spring and cow parsley in the early summer.’

Now, the garden team is extending the season of interest with autumn-flowering bulbs and spring-flowering scented shrubs so that when Chastleton reopens, visitors can enjoy this walk with its new perspectives on the garden and house.

You can also watch the progress of the Best Garden as it enters year two of the three year project to restore the topiary and recreate cascading Arts and Crafts style borders.

Chastleton reopens on 4 March.

For a large print version, please call us on 0344 800 1895 or email lse.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk

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Design Savarna Designs
Print Walstead, Bicester
Printed on 100% recycled paper, please recycle after use.
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