Ravishing ROUSHAM

Alongside stately parkland, this inspiring Oxfordshire landmark boasts an array of cottage-garden favourites



Described by Monty Don as 'one of the greatest gardens in the world', Rousham is an intimate landscape steeped in the past. Created in the 18th century by William Kent, it is faithful to his original vision, which brought Italian classical influence to rural Oxfordshire. As an architect, painter and stage designer, Kent created a 'pleasure garden', much like a piece of immersive theatre. There is great use of the play between light and shade, where dappled pathways emerge from lush woodland into masterfully arranged open scenes, with statues, temples, bridges, follies and water features. Kent borrowed from the surrounding landscape too, creating sweeping views to the River Cherwell and using 'eyecatchers' (fake buildings) on the skyline to draw the gaze. Even the handsome longhorn cattle grazing in the parkland are elements of a staged scene.

Owned by the same family for more than 300 years, the gardens remain one of Kent's most complete creations. Resolutely uncommercialised (there's no cafe or shop), the gardens fan out from the immaculately striped Bowling Lawn surrounding the austere house. Narrow tracks spin off in all directions and lead to pools, cascades, statues and a seven-arched colonnade. Another path dives through a 20-foot-deep yew hedge to a secret walled garden. And whichever way you wander, you will be enchanted by the atmosphere of a place that has stood still in time.



THE PRAENESTE

The colonnaded Praeneste is built on a steep bank and was modelled on an Italian ruin. It's the perfect spot to sit and contemplate views of the River Cherwell flowing along the garden boundary.

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WALLED GARDEN
Mysterious doorways and disappearing paths beckon the visitor. A blue wrought-iron gate sets off the opulent pink roses and pale brickwork, and begs to be unlatched or peered through.

BOX PARTERRE
One of three 17th-century gardens, it's planted with fragrant roses and foxgloves. At its centre is the Pigeon House (pictured, right), encircled by an espaliered pear tree and fan-trained Morello cherry tree.



THE RILL
A snaking rill passes through the deep shade of overhanging trees and into a sun-bathed octagonal Cold Bath, fed by spring water. Despite its age, the design looks minimal and contemporary. >>





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Get the look

In contrast to its lush green parkland, Rousham's hidden walled gardens are planted with colourful cottage-garden classics



MALUS DOMESTICA

The apple trees at Rousham are over 100 years old and still productive. Planting will give pleasure for years; most start fruiting after two to three years. The 'Family Apple Tree' has three varieties grafted onto one stem and can be grown in a big container. Grow in a sheltered, sunny site and feed and water regularly in the first year.
From thompson-morgan.com



ROSA 'VEILCHENBLAU' AGM

This fruity-scented rambler grows within the sheltered walls at Rousham, and bears clusters of semi-double, deep-magenta flowers that fade to pale lilac. Fast-growing, it flowers abundantly in full sun or light shade, in fertile, well-drained soil, and has a height and spread of 2.5-4m. Train over a wall, fence or arch.
From crocus.co.uk



CENTRANTHUS RUBER

Red valerian is a no-fuss perennial that flowers non-stop from July to October. It thrives in poor soil, tolerates drought and copes with coastal conditions too. Its nectar-rich, red-pink flowers are born on tall fleshy stems, and are a great draw for bees and butterflies. Deadhead regularly to keep flowers coming.
From crocus.co.uk



ALCHEMILLA MOLLIS AGM

A cottage-garden staple that works brilliantly edging a path and disguising the stems of taller plants. Its soft-green, hairy, scalloped leaves look magical dotted with dew, and its acid-green flower heads are exuberantly frothy. It's tolerant of almost any soil and aspect, but doesn't like to dry out. Cut back fading flowers for a repeat show.
From sarahraven.com



GERANIUM X *MAGNIFICUM* 'ROSEMOOR' AGM

This hardy geranium delivers a blast of intense violet-blue in early summer. Its saucer-shaped flowers bring pollinators in, and its mounded form quickly spreads to make an attractive ground cover. Virtually maintenance-free (you can remove old leaves if desired), it's happy in part shade, but will flower best in sun.
From crocus.co.uk



LYSIMACHIA PUNCTATA

Another cottage favourite, golden loosestrife brings a swathe of joyful yellow to the garden from July to September. Its upright, elegant form (90cm high) contrasts well with rounded shapes, and it does well in sun or semi shade, as long as the soil does not dry out. It's a good contender for heavy clay, damp borders or a pond edge.
From thompson-morgan.com

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