The entrance to Sissinghurst is through a range of low buildings, with the Elizabethan tower looming behind. In front is a sweep of flower meadow, sown with yellow rattle. In late summer it is cut for hay, as it would have been in Vita and Harold's time.

Romantic VISION

For an old-fashioned country-garden style and gorgeous planting schemes, head to Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent



One of the UK's most celebrated gardens, Sissinghurst is steeped in romance, harking back to a dreamlike era of drowsy summer afternoons, breathless with the scent of old roses. Almost hidden among the tall hedgerows of the Kentish Weald, the site was once a Tudor mansion. By the time it was purchased in the early 1930s by author, poet and garden designer Vita Sackville-West and her diplomat husband, Harold Nicolson, all that remained was a dilapidated Elizabethan tower and a collection of tumbledown farm buildings.

The couple spent the next 30 years awakening what they called their 'sleeping beauty' – Harold setting down the architectural bones and Vita applying her artistic eye to the planting. In many ways, it's a quintessential English country garden, with its red-brick walls and mullioned windows dripping with roses, cottage borders and herb beds and an old orchard knee-deep in long grass.

Yet there are twists everywhere: the cottage garden is an experiment in marrying hot colours; the orchard trees are sturdy props for climbing roses – and where else in the home counties could you find a replica of a Greek island garden, complete with fallen columns? Then there's the magical white garden, which Vita imagined as a moonlit landscape with a white barn owl swooping over it.

After Vita's death in 1962, Sissinghurst was bequeathed to the National Trust, and is one of its most popular properties. Go early in the day or late in the afternoon to avoid the crowds and immerse yourself in this magical and poetic garden.







THE ROSE GARDEN
Vita adored roses and declared she was 'drunk' on them. The garden reaches a sensory peak in June-July, with an almost overwhelming profusion of scent, colour and texture.

THE WHITE GARDEN
A moonlit masterpiece, envisioned by Vita as 'a low sea of grey clumps of foliage, pierced here and there with tall, white flowers'. Best viewed at dusk, when the white flowers are almost luminous.



TOWER VIEW
From her study on the first floor of the Elizabethan tower, Vita had a bird's eye view of the grounds. Here you can see the strong, geometric shapes of walls, paths and hedges that define the garden. >>



Get the look

Sissinghurst weaves its magic with dense plantings and strictly controlled themes. Take inspiration from the ethereal white garden with these white and silver plants.



BUDDLEJA DAVIDII 'WHITE PROFUSION' AGM

This elegant buddleja is as much a lure for butterflies as the purple form. Fragrant and fast growing, it carries large flowers on arching stems, July to September. Unfussy about soil or aspect, it needs space to stretch but can be pruned back. **Available from thompson-morgan.com**



LILIUM REGALE AGM

For high-summer scent, it's hard to beat regal lilies. These tall perennials are an English border staple, and perform equally well in containers. Plant bulbs in well-drained soil in autumn or early spring, in a sheltered, sunny nook, and stake before they reach full height. **Available from sarahraven.com**



ROSE 'MADAME ALFRED CARRIÈRE' AGM

The first rose Vita planted at Sissinghurst, this is a strong climber that will clothe a north-facing wall in creamy white blooms from June, repeat flowering to September. It can be trained over arches for a romantic vibe. It does best in fertile, well-drained soil. **Available from crocus.co.uk**



CISTUS X HYBRIDUS

Another sun-worshipper, *Cistus,* or rock rose, is an evergreen shrub that, in early summer, is covered in a profusion of crimson buds that open to papery white blooms. It is at home in a Mediterranean-style border, gravel garden or large pot. It will need protection in freezing winters. **Available from crocus.co.uk**



ARTEMISIA 'POWIS CASTLE' AGM

A hardy evergreen perennial that forms a mound of silvery, aromatic leaves. Drought tolerant, use it to line sunny paths. Fast growing (up to 60cm high), it can be cut back in spring to encourage new leaves. Grow as a foil for coloured blooms. **Available from thompson-morgan.com**



COSMOS 'PURITY'

Producing snow-white flowers from June-July, its apple-green foliage and delicate stems bring a light feel to the border. Grow from seed in May or buy in plants and put in their growing position after the last frost. It will need support if growing in a windy spot. **Available from sarahraven.co.uk**

WORDS: CHRIS MORLEY. PHOTOS: JONATHAN BUCKLEY, NATIONAL TRUST/RACHEL WARNE, *SISSINGHURST: THE DREAM GARDEN* BY TIM RICHARDSON (£30, FRANCES LINCOLN)