COUNTRY LIFE

Five British gardens have a starring role on the New York Times's list of 25 must-see gardens — here are the ones they forgot

Multiple British gardens have topped a New York Times list.



Sissinghurst Castle Garden, in Kent, was described as 'probably the most famous English garden there is,' by one of the judges on the T: The New York Times Style Magazine panel.
(Image credit: Alamy)



BY LOTTE BRUNDLE PUBLISHED 2 DAYS AGO

T: The New York Times Style Magazine — widely known to be an exceptional tastemaker — has spoken, and it loves our gardens. A long staple of what it means to be British, perhaps due to the copious amounts of rain making for perfect plant-growing conditions, botanical exploits have long been a staple of our country's heritage. You need only look at the Chelsea Flower Show or to one of our many National Trust sites to see how seriously we take gardening.

The magazine's list of 'The 25 Gardens You Must See' is fantastic reading for anyone with green fingers. It has been compiled by a group of six experts, including Louis Benech, the French landscape designer known for her contributions to the overhaul of the Tuileries, in Paris, in 1990, and Juliet Sargeant, the first black woman to have a Chelsea Show Garden (she won a gold medal).

Each panellist was asked to nominate ten gardens which were then whittled down to the finest 25 — following a passionate, four-hour-long debate. Among the nominations were gardens from 20 countries, but it was the UK, along with Italy, that triumphed — with five gardens apiece. France came in a close second with four.

The list-topping British gardens include Sissinghurst Castle Garden — the Kentish idyll into which author Vita Sackville-West and her husband, diplomat Harold Nicolson, moved in 1930. The former likened the site to 'Sleeping Beauty's castle' and dedicated a weekly column in *The Observer* to it.

Sissinghurst — with its moat-framed fruit orchard and newly-restored Greek-inspired Delos garden — is an outstanding place to visit, and that's before you consider the White Garden, perhaps its most famous feature. 'It's probably the most famous English garden there is,' says judge and *T's* former editor-in-chief, Deborah Needleman. And, I'd postulate, as someone who has had the pleasure of visiting, the most beautiful.

The Great Dixter House and Gardens in Northiam — the longtime home of horticulturalist and garden writer, Christopher Lloyd — is also praised. Comprising a kitchen garden, wildflower meadows and Old Rose Garden, now bursting with exotic plants, Dixter is 'the most intense horticultural garden in the world,' according to Tim Richardson, judge and the author of 22 garden books.

Prospect Cottage in Dungeness — the Kent headland that is also home to a nuclear power station — also makes the list. The beachside cottage, the former home of artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman, has an incongruous feel to it, as does Dungeness in general. Sargeant recommends visiting Prospect Cottage, Great Dixter and Sissinghurst on the same day 'because the three together make a wonderfully contrasting tour'.

Rousham House and Gardens in Oxfordshire, and Little Sparta in Dunsyre, Scotland, are the other two British gardens that feauture on the list. The first boasts 300-year-old paths, and views of the River Cherwell, as well as a faux ruin named The Eyecatcher — installed in an attempt to give the estate a more classical edge. The second is just an hour from Edinburgh, and, from 1966, was inhabited by the poet and artist Ian Hamilton Finlay.

Finlay nicknamed his garden 'Little Sparta' — a reference to the Scottish capital's fame as the 'Athens of the North' — due to its numerous neoclassical structures. Needless to say, he had a wicked sense of humour, and the garden is home to his own installation of headstones and other sculptures, including a pair of enormous stone hand grenades.



Ian Hamilton Finlay at his home in Little Sparta, in 2016
(Image credit: Tom Kidd/Alamy)