



The Sundial Garden
Opposite page: King
Charles enjoying the
fruits of his labour

A garden fit FOR A KING

To celebrate the Coronation a book about the garden Charles III has created at Highgrove, his country house, is being reissued. **Ciar Byrne** takes a look around His Majesty's pride and joy

As a child His Majesty King Charles III was given a plot of his own to garden at the Royal Lodge, Windsor. It inspired a lifelong passion which has seen him become one of our most enthusiastic advocates of organic and environmentally friendly gardening. Nowhere is this more evident than at his home of Highgrove in Gloucestershire, which he has transformed over the past three decades into a series of gardens that delight 40,000 visitors each year. Originally called High Grove, the Georgian house near the market town of Tetbury was built between 1796 and 1798 on the site of an older property. Before King Charles arrived there in 1980, it was the home of Maurice Macmillan, son of the former

British prime minister Harold Macmillan, and the gardens had become overgrown and neglected. Bunny Guinness, co-author with King Charles of *Highgrove: A Garden Celebrated*, which is being reissued this month to coincide with the Coronation, says: 'I can't think of any other member of the royal family recently who has been as actively interested in gardening. Prince Charles really got his hands dirty, rolled up his sleeves, in the early days particularly, and put his flesh and blood into it. He had a level of dedication and interest that helped him to define the many things he wanted to do, like saving rare apple species and wildflower meadows.' His Majesty set about creating a series of deeply personal gardens.

To begin with he consulted the influential American garden designer Lanning Roper, but he was too ill to take on the commission and died aged 71 in 1983. Guinness believes his untimely death profoundly affected the development of the garden. 'After Lanning Roper died Prince Charles took over a major part in the design,' she says. 'It's a very different garden to what Lanning Roper would have done. What we have now is a one-off. It's very unlike the usual National Trust garden. There aren't many gardens of this scale that are so idiosyncratic. It's definitely got his stamp on it.' His Majesty, then Prince Charles, set about creating the gardens with the help of some of the leading garden designers of recent years, including >

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Opposite page, clockwise from top: The Cottage Garden; the lily pool with the Borghese Gladiator sculpture; delphiniums in the Sundial Garden. Left: yew topiary and pleached hornbeam hedging alongside the Thyme Walk

a woodland pool is topped by giant gunnera. This area of the garden is also home to The Wall of Gifts, an eye-catching collection of pieces of architectural stone given to the King, as well as antipodean tree ferns such as *Dicksonia antarctica* and *Cyathea australis*.

In the Arboretum, which started life as a larch plantation and has been developed since 1992, there are acers, beech trees and cherry trees, as well as magnolias, which are a particular favourite of His Majesty. Beneath the canopy of the trees thousands of woodland plants flower, including cyclamen, sweet woodruff, and creeping buttercups, which are wonderful pollinators. There is also a sculpture titled The Daughters of Odessa by Frederick Hart, which was presented to the King in 1997. It depicts the daughters of Tsar Nicholas II, who were killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918. Other highlights include two orchards and a walled kitchen garden that provides organic food for the estate.

HM King Charles, who was awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour in 2009 for his commitment to gardening, is one of three members of the royal family who are celebrated in the first temporary exhibition in the newly reopened Old Laboratory at RHS Wisley, the Royal Horticultural Society's flagship garden in Surrey.

The exhibition, Royal Roots, looks at the RHS's long tradition of commissioning floral signature paintings from leading botanical artists that are then signed by the society's royal patrons.

The first of these was Queen Charlotte, the wife of George III, over 200 years ago, and Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were also enthusiastic supporters. In each botanical painting the artist depicts flowers and plants that reflect the patron's horticultural interests. For their signature painting King Charles and Camilla, the Queen Consort, chose wildflowers from Transylvania in Romania, a region >



the late Lady Salisbury, who famously told him to talk to his plants, for which he was ridiculed at the time. She also advised him on organic gardening and designed a rose garden, which has evolved into the Sundial Garden. Here, the King's favourite delphiniums are the star of the show. Low clipped hedges of euonymus encircle the sundial, which gives the garden its name. Yew hedges with clipped windows reveal busts of Charles at different times in his life.

Topiary is a repeated theme of the garden, reaching a pinnacle in the Thyme Walk, an avenue of golden yews shaped into whimsical forms,

bounded on either side by pleached hornbeam hedges. The paving is planted with different varieties of thyme, marjoram and, in spring, primroses. The walk leads from the house and Terrace Garden to the lily pool and the bronze Borghese Gladiator statue that was given to His Majesty by Lord Cholmondeley.

The late Rosemary Verey, who lived and gardened at nearby Barnsley House, helped to design the planting scheme in the Old Cottage Garden, which is traditionally English in style with poppies, salvias, rosemary, and geraniums. *Alchemilla mollis*, or lady's mantle, has been allowed to

self-seed between the paving stones and there is an oak summer house, designed by the King in collaboration with Mark Hoare, an architect and designer who specialises in using natural building materials.

Julian and Isabel Bannerman designed a circular seat around a topiarised English yew, made from Derbyshire gritstone and carved by masons from Hereford Cathedral. There is an urn in the garden that is surrounded by clouds of catmint in summer – Prince Harry was once found hiding there as a toddler – as well as a golden-leaved Indian bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea'),

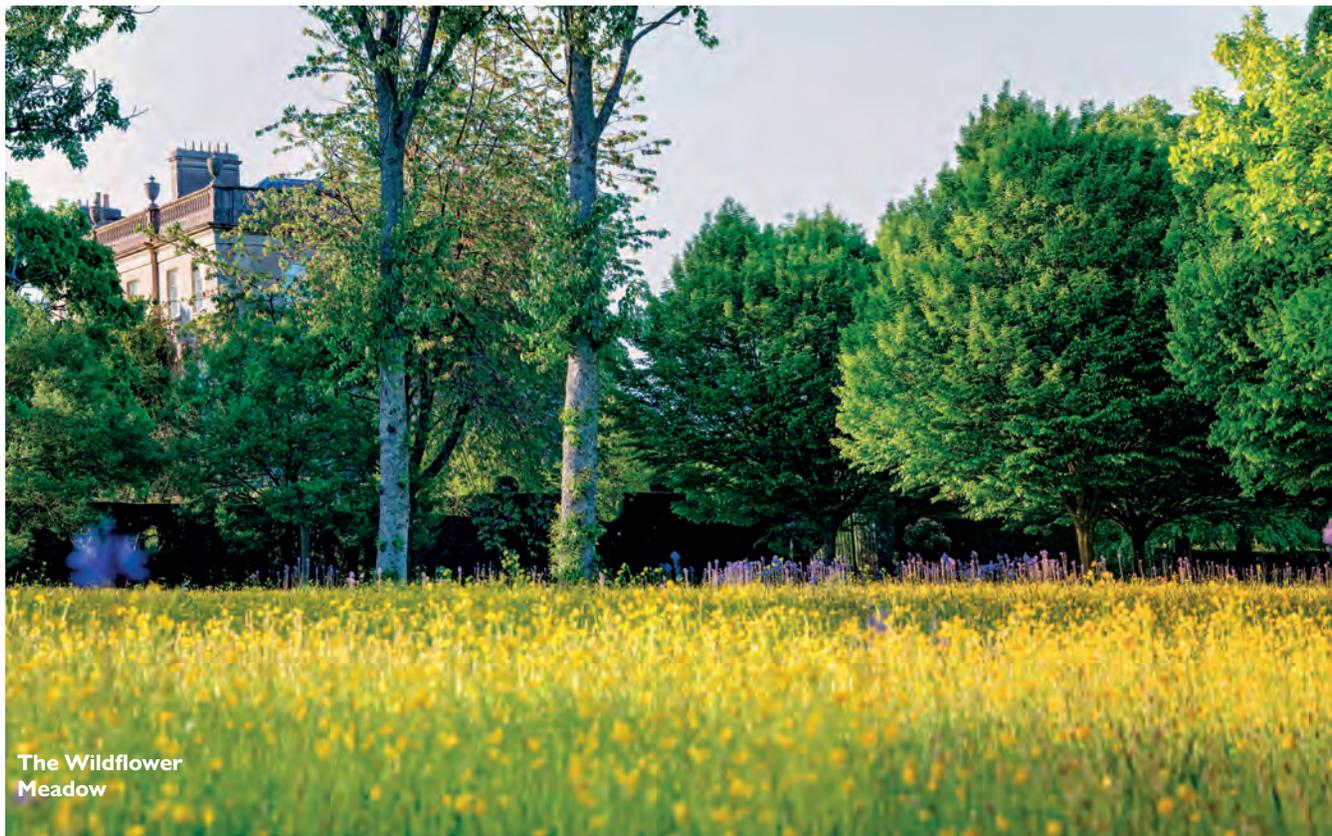
'Topiary is a repeated theme of the garden, reaching a pinnacle in the Thyme Walk'

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which was a 50th birthday present to Charles from Elton John.

In the New Cottage Garden there is a vibrant yellow, pink and blue theme, and specimen trees including a black mulberry (*Morus nigra*) and variegated tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Aureomarginata').

The Bannermans also designed The Stumpery, a woodland garden inspired by the Victorian tradition of growing ferns between tree stumps. Here there is a classical temple, also by Hoare and carved from green oak, beside David Wynne's Goddess of the Woods sculpture. A tower of naturalistic stone emerging from



The Wildflower Meadow

the King fell in love with and where he owns property surrounded by meadows. In 2018 he commissioned 36 leading botanical artists to produce the Transylvanian Florilegium, which records some of the species found there, including campanulas, crocuses, gentians, hepaticas, hellebores and pasqueflowers.

The signature plant associated with King Charles in the exhibition is yellow rattle (*Rhianthus minor*), also called the ‘meadow maker’ because it weakens vigorous grasses, allowing wildflowers to flourish.

Yellow rattle is one of the many species growing in the four-acre Wildflower Meadow at Highgrove, which was developed by Miriam Rothschild in 1982 using a seed mix comprised of 32 species of native plants, including ox-eye daisies, common spotted orchid, cranesbill, and ragged robin. It now contains more than 70 different varieties of plants and in 2012 became the first of 60 Coronation Meadows, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Coronation of the late Queen Elizabeth II.

The meadow changes through the seasons, with wild daffodils or Lent lilies appearing in spring that give way to orchids and other wildflowers later

in the year. It is managed according to traditional hay meadow principles: cut back in summer then grazed by sheep in the autumn. The animals help by treading seeds into the ground. Oak, chestnut, poplar, and beech trees are dotted around the meadow and a pathway lined with fastigate hornbeams runs across it.

Also on show at Wisley is the Highgrove Florilegium, a two-volume set of botanical prints depicting the plants, vegetables, fruit and trees grown in the garden. The book took 72 botanical artists seven years to produce, with accompanying text by botanists from the Natural History Museum. Only 175 copies are in existence, each signed by King Charles when he was Prince of Wales and sold to raise money for his charitable foundation.

At Sandringham, his late mother’s much-loved home in Norfolk, King Charles is now replacing the lawn in front of the house with a new topiary garden to reflect changing weather patterns, which will open to the public later this year.

Bunny Guinness was a frequent visitor to Highgrove while she was writing the book. ‘I remember His Majesty saying to me that at the end of every summer he likes to look at the

‘He likes to look at the gardens and think: “What can we do next?”’

gardens and think: ‘What can we do next?’ Like many gardeners, a lot of the fun is creating new spaces. I imagine now he’s got a few more royal residences he can have a go at, we might well see that happen. They probably haven’t had that sort of input for many years.’ ■

◆ For information and to book tours visit highgrovegardens.com. *Highgrove: A Garden Celebrated by His Majesty King Charles III and Bunny Guinness* is published by Orion, price £35, on 27 April. The Royal Roots exhibition is at The Old Laboratory, RHS Wisley, until 26 May (free for RHS members, from £16.50 for non-members). For other books and videos by Bunny Guinness visit bunnyguinness.com



PICTURE: GAP PHOTOS/HIGHGROVE