

The Magnificent Seven... Norfolk Gardens

The Herb Garden, Congham Hall

Our renowned Herb Garden draws visitors from far and wide. First planted in 1982, it now features many varieties of herbs – from basil to buckler leaf sorrel – including rarities such as goat's rue, once used to treat the plague. This lovely collection is a working garden, too. Herbs are picked twice a day for use in our 2 AA Rosette restaurant, The Samphire Kitchen, to flavour and garnish dishes and infuse oils and vinegars. Rosemary plucked from the plot is one of the ingredients in the Muscle Melt Massage, the soothing signature massage in our Secret Garden Spa. Our herb garden is open to guests year-round and to the public 10am-3pm, April to September.

Congham Hall Hotel, Lynn Road, Congham, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE32 1AH

T 01485 600250 / www.conghamhallhotel.co.uk

Gooderstone Water Gardens

In 1970, local farmer Billy Knights created the Gooderstone Water Gardens out of a wet meadow that was too damp for his cattle to graze. Until his death in 1994, Mr Knights refused to be a slave to fashion and added to the gardens according to his own tastes. Today, the naturalistic planting of native and cultivated varieties enhances the unspoiled surroundings. Plants of note include Astilbe, bamboos, daylilies, Eupatorium, Ligularia, loosestrife and mace sedges. Look out for kingfishers on the eight-acre nature trail and follow the sequence of 13 bridges to explore four ponds and a flowing stream.

Gooderstone Water Gardens, The Street, Gooderstone, Norfolk PE33 9BP

T 01603 712913 / www.gooderstonewatergardens.co.uk

West Acre Gardens

Old romantics will love this walled garden in the grounds of a Norfolk manor. It's an inspiring place to gather ideas for home, blooming with popular and more unusual shrubs, trees and grasses. Check out the Mediterranean and Shade gardens and tell the time with the garden's sun clock using your own shadow. There's no tea shop here, but you are welcome to bring a picnic, with seats positioned around the gardens to provide tranquil and relaxing flower-filled views. Stock up at the nursery, renowned for its extensive home-grown selection.

West Acre Gardens, Tumblehill Road, West Acre, Norfolk PE32 2BW

T 01760 755562 / www.westacregardens.co.uk

Pensthorpe Natural Park

The former home of BBC TV's *Springwatch*, Pensthorpe Natural Park, near Fakenham, offers three of the county's most spectacular gardens to view. In the Wave Garden, Chelsea Gold Medal-winning Julie Toll has created a lakeside retreat under a canopy of native oak and birch. In the Millennium Garden, plantsman Piet Oudolf reveals the colourful yet naturalistic style of design for which he is revered. While The Wildlife Habitat Garden, forming a bridge between the formal gardens and the park, is where dragonflies, frogs and bats frolic. Join the Wensum Discovery Tour, an hour-long exploration by Land Rover of the remote areas of this reserve.

Pensthorpe Natural Park, Pensthorpe Road, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 0LN

T 01328 851465 / www.pensthorpe.com

Houghton Hall

Houghton Hall, built for Britain's first prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, is one of the country's finest Palladian mansions. Yet, many of today's visitors also come here to see the contemporary art gallery that has been created in the grounds by the current Marquess of Cholmondeley. As well as special exhibitions by artists of world-renown such as Henry Moore and Anish Kapoor, Lord Cholmondeley has commissioned sculptures for his permanent collection by James Turrell, Rachel Whiteread, Anya Gallaccio and others.

Houghton Hall, Houghton, Norfolk PE31 6UE

T 01485 528569 / www.houghtonhall.com

Norfolk Lavender

Close to The Wash, this 100-acre plot was but a dream back in 1932, when local florist Linn Chilvers ignored the sceptics and planted his first 13,000 plants. Now this is the home of the national collection of lavenders, run in association with conservation charity Plant Heritage. The deep purple fields of the heady-scented herb are a striking sight, especially when they're in full bloom in summer. You can buy many rare and unusual varieties here, such as Lavender Hidcote, plus fragrant potions created from the oil at the on-site distillery.

Norfolk Lavender, Caley Mill, Heacham, Norfolk PE31 7JE

T 01485 570384 / www.norfolk-lavender.co.uk

Sandringham Estate

Discover one of the finest royal gardens in the realm at the Queen's Sandringham Estate. Since Edward VII bought this Georgian mansion in 1862, its gardens have been added to extensively, a study in the changing tastes of horticultural design during the past 150 years. There are pleached lime avenues, carrstone rockeries, romantic lakes and formal gardens to admire. For horticulture buffs, The Woodland Walk and Bog Gardens are examples of the work of Sir Eric Savill, famous for his creations at Windsor Castle in the 1960s. Get an expert view on one of the hour-long guided walks, which have changing themes to suit the seasons.

The Sandringham Estate, Sandringham, Norfolk PE35 6EN

T 01485 544112 / www.sandringhamestate.co.uk

Please check the individual venues for opening times before you visit.

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