

## England Birds & Gardens Tours - Garden Highlights

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By Lucy Chang The exuberance of spring in the natural and cultivated environment is what England garden tours are all about!



*Pleached lime walk, Tuscan pots, statue beyond*



*Fritillaries and grape hyacinths*



*Underfoot plantings of lime tree*

Samplings of the cultivated environment on our England Birds & Gardens tour include Sissinghurst Castle Garden's pleached lime walk where hundreds, nay, thousands of tulips, narcissi, fritillaries, anemones and grape hyacinths at the feet of the pleached lime trees heralded the arrival of spring. At the gardens of Great Dixter, we go beyond the much touted long border and whimsical topiaries and observe such gems as the native early purple orchis, plantains, checkered fritillaries, bluebells and naturalized blue quamash that stud the front meadow.



*The long border - tulips, forget-me-nots,  
spurge, yew hedge*



*Early purple orchis*

See nature versus nurture at the Lost Gardens of Heligan where trees, shrubs, vines and myriads of cultivated exotics succumbed or adapted to seventy years of abandonment. Introduced by early plant hunters from China, the rare Hankerchief tree (or more charmingly called the Dove tree for its similarity to a dove in flight when blown by the wind) was in splendid display for our 2011 tour.



*Davidia involucrata - Dove tree*



*Handkerchief tree, Ghost tree*

The fascinating part of Heligan's gardens is not just the drama about their loss and rediscovery but also their ongoing restoration (Victorian gardens) that attempts to incorporate current sustainable practices - is that workable? We'll find out with return visits. Of the many botanical wonders at the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, none is as striking as the Wollemi pine that has flourished to cone bearing maturity since 2005 when our tour group first saw the newly propagated stripling protected within a metal cage. After a visit to Compton Acres, I have changed my view of statuary and sculptures "littering" the garden. This is a garden with the largest display of such artifacts that could be amusing, inspiring, eye-catching or ornamental overload. Here are samplings from scenes in the Italian Garden, Japanese Garden, Wooded Valley (bronze tiger), Water Garden (Tom



Merrifield's dancer 'Solitude') and Sculpture Gardens. And for a completely different art form, there is nothing more artistically defined than the topiaries and



clipped hedges at Nymans Garden.

The chess figures, huddled cones and pyramids, towering columns and flower basket in-the-making are just a peek at more to discover.