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the kitchen garden at chatsworth house

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Posted in All Gardening Advice, Vegetables and Fruit, May, June, July, August on 1st August 2019

SALE

Adrian Brocklebank is the vegetable gardener at Chatsworth House, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, and I'm deeply jealous. I love growing veg, but I'd love it even more if I could do so in this extraordinary place.

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The Chatsworth vegetable patch

The Chatsworth House veg garden almost inevitably has lovely soil, adequate manpower (there are three gardeners working in this area) and tons of space, spreading over a two-and-a-half acre, west-facing slope, perched above the old stables. It fills ground that was once a horse paddock until cars took over and looks out over the elegant stable roofs and clock tower.

From the top, you look down to huge sweeping beds that house the space-hungry crops – berries, brassicas, **comfrey**, **rhubarb** and **asparagus** – then down further to a long herb bed that runs north to south, dividing the site in two, which is perched above four, large, raised beds, with neater, more compact crops in rows – salads, herbs – and the odd arched or standard fruit tree.

All through the Chatsworth House garden runs a small, fast-flowing stream of spring water which, once filtered, is sold by the bottle in the restaurant. The stream provides both a perfect soundtrack and good humidity to keep the worst mildew at bay. Watercress grows in it and the gardeners can dip into it – wherever they are – to fill the odd watering can to supplement their hoses and sprinklers.

The Chatsworth Greenhouses

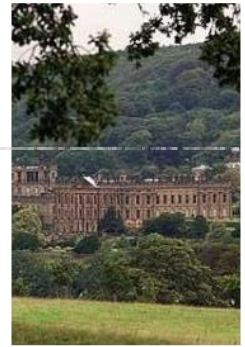
The four 50ft greenhouses were built in 1890, and every bit of each one is still intact, with the same hand-opening vents, the same pipework running along at the same constant 61F. That's lovely and luxurious enough in itself, but made so much better by the long-standing Chatsworth tradition of pushing the boat out as far as possible in terms of what can be grown.

Here they want – and have – lemons and pawpaws to harvest from their own trees, melons dripping from the roofs, muscat grapes to pick by the crate-load (more on that later in October when the grapes are at their sweetest) and the best late-flowering **chrysanthemums** (such as the spider green, 'Shamrock') to pick until Christmas for the house. Even in winter, the glasshouses are kept at a temperature to grow ginger and **lemon verbena** to supply the house with **home-made tea**. That's what's so remarkable about this place – that the truly good and old runs alongside the truly new.

The creativity and passion at Chatsworth

The Duke and Duchess seem to like to keep the creative ball rolling and you'll see that in the produce filling the veg beds and greenhouses, just as you will in the new hangings of the incredible works of art inside the house.

In this veg garden there are cabbages (the pointy-shaped variety 'Hispi') growing in mini wire cages to keep the pheasants at bay, and there are plenty of **carrots**, **potatoes** and some **leeks**, but they're next to more exciting things – lines of cape gooseberries, the tallest, bushiest peas I've ever seen, outdoor-growing **chillies**, huge, crinkly, green lettuces ('Australian Yellow Leaf'), as well as a sea of chicory, sea kale and many varieties of **pumpkin** and **squash**.



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Driving all this industry along is a foodie's passion. The flow of produce travels direct from the garden to Sophie Burnside, the head cook. Sophie is 100% engaged in what's growing in the garden and in putting it on to people's plates. The crops from the garden are her main inspiration in designing her menus from one week to the next. Here the grower, cook and boss all agree – every meal should be centred around the best possible food they can produce in the garden.

Believe me, in the vegetable-growing business, that's very unusual, and the reason that I left Chatsworth House longing to join their team.

Three of the best edibles from Chatsworth

The Mummy pea

This amazing variety of pea is allegedly a descendant from peas found in the Pyramids. It grows exceptionally tall (up to 12ft) and so crops for a very long time, producing delicious, sweet-tasting peas from June until September.

Sophie uses Mummy peas all summer in salads, soups and as a vegetable. The seed was given to the Duke several years ago and they've kept their own seed ever since.

'Nine Star' perennial broccoli

Another very unusual vegetable variety – a sprouting broccoli that crops at the same time as the others in spring, with white curds, but does so for five years on the trot.

I always seem to forget to sow my purple sprouting in time for summer planting and here's the answer – a perennial variety that crops year on year.

Pineapple sage

An elegant, bushy plant with lovely lush foliage, which – when crushed – gives off the most delicious fresh pineapple scent. In autumn, it is covered in red, typically sage-like, large-lower-lipped flowers, which are also edible.

Sophie often uses these to decorate soups and salads and the leaves can be chopped up for an extra tang in a fruit salad.

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