

Preparing for the future at Hodnet Hall Gardens

Gardener Ross Underwood give us a sneak preview of the developments at this magnificent garden



Hodnet has been a relative newcomer to the Plant Hunter's Fairs but we have been overwhelmed by the response from the public on even the wettest days. This has been all the more surprising as the garden had become less well known in recent years than it formerly was.

Encouraged by the response to the limited opening hours offered 2014 will see a more significant re-launch of the garden. We will now be open every Sunday and Bank Holiday from the first weekend in April to the last weekend in September. In addition, Hodnet and our close neighbour Wollerton Old Hall Garden have joined forces to offer visitors a specially priced ticket which will get you into both gardens on ordinary open days. Our forthcoming new website will keep everyone up to date on the latest developments.

We are planning for the future in the garden too. Hodnet has always been known for the rhododendron display in May and June. Recently we have been clearing and regenerating areas of the garden and many species rhododendrons have been planted. These should make a pleasing contrast to the hardy hybrids which are the mainstay of the spring display. Species such as *R. sinogrande* (picture top right) or *R. kesangiae* flower earlier than the main display extending the season in one direction. The fine foliage on many of these plants also means there is something to look at for the rest of the year. *R. hodgsonii* and *R. thomsonii* are attractive even in winter with beautiful flaking bark. All rhododendrons enjoy a free draining humus rich acid soil but many, even the large leaved species can be cultivated in pots if a satisfactory regime of watering and feeding is kept up. Never put a small plant in a large pot but instead pot as necessary going one size up each time with a good compost.



Hodnet was also awarded National Collection Status in 2014 for *Cercidiphyllum* (photo lower right). These wonderful trees colour beautifully in autumn and give off a powerful aroma of toffee as the leaves fall, hence the common name of 'burnt sugar trees'. Although they can reach huge proportions in Asia there are some more manageable cultivars including 'Boyd's Dwarf' that can be accommodated in more modest gardens. *Cercidiphyllum* are fairly adaptable in regards to soil and will even grow in wetter conditions but good light is a must to get the best out of them.



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