



## **A Complete Guide to Mount Congreve**

Mr. Congreve began planting Mount Congreve in his late teens. Lorry loads of plants arrived, carriage paid, from Lionel de Rothschild, including plants such as *Rhododendron sinogrande*, a magnificent species from Yunnan, Burma, and Tibet, discovered and introduced by George Forrest in 1913. One of the original plantings can be seen under the terrace gardens, with huge limbs resting on the woodland floor and exotic foliage up to three feet long and of course huge trusses of creamy-white to yellow flowers. It is well worth seeking out.

It was not until 1955 that Mr. Congreve began to make large clearings in the woodlands to create the necessary conditions where the plants would thrive. With the arrival of Mr Herman Dool in the early sixties, who was Garden Director for thirty-nine years, the two men set about creating what is said by the Horticultural Society of Massachusetts to be a 'Great Garden of the World'.

One of Mr. Congreve's philosophies was that when one plants anything, whether it involves five or fifty plants, they should be planted together and not dotted singularly around the garden. The fruition of this particular philosophy can be seen during the spring and early summer when the gardens are awash with breath-taking sweeps of Azaleas, Camellias, Magnolias, and *Rhododendron*. One particular planting is of over one hundred *Rhododendron* 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam' - a very tender cross (*R.ciliatum* x *R.edgeworthii*). In flower, it is a treat for the eye and a joy to the nasal sense with its wonderful fragrance.

### **Surprises & Vantages Points**

Mr Congreve also believed that every garden should have surprises and good vantage points, where the garden and the surrounding landscape can be viewed to compliment each other. With this in mind, the garden has exceptional vistas overlooking bends in the neighbouring River Suir, particularly in March/April when framed with flowering trees of the Asiatic *Magnolia campbellii* and *Magnolia sprengeri*. The garden has many surprises throughout which include a Chinese Pagoda in the centre of an old quarry that is spectacular when viewed from above. A classical temple surrounded by *Rhododendron yunnanense* and *Rhododendron* 'Hino-crimson' (EA) is located above a beautiful view of the River Suir and the neighbouring countryside. An artificial waterfall cascading over a natural rock into three small pools is edged with water margin plants such as *Lysichiton americanus*, *Caltha palustris*, and *Primula pulverlenta*.

Beyond the waterfall many fine stone terraces were built in order to plant *Magnolia campbellii* seedlings. Above these, seventy two *Rhododendron*

macabeanum were planted on the sloping hills, producing huge trusses of flowers ranging in colour from pale primrose to canary yellow. This is a truly beautiful Rhododendron named for Mr McCabe - a former Deputy Commissioner of the Naga hills - for the assistance he gave to Kingdon Ward who introduced it around 1928. Planted nearby is a small group of *Magnolia macrophylla* which have huge undulating leaves, over three feet long, and definitely the most exotic looking foliage of all the Magnolias, reminding one of the leaves of a banana plant.

In 1969 over eighty *Magnolia campbellii* seedlings, raised in Mount Congreve from seed collected several years previously from trees growing in the terrace garden, were cleverly planted on the lower slopes. These can now be viewed from above, on an elevated walk several hundred metres long. Flowering in March/April on leafless stems and against the background of a clear blue sky, one could not but fall instantly in love with these majestic trees. They give a glimpse of the Himalayas, which would have been seen by Kingdon Ward, on first encountering these magnificent trees in 1930.

## Walks

Another walk overlooking a spectacular view of the River Suir as it turns gently North/East is framed by over a hundred Magnolias. Many of these are Mount Congreve selections raised from seed in the early sixties. Underneath the *Magnolia campbellii* and *Magnolia sargentiana* are planted many different forms of *Magnolia x soulangiana* such as M.'Lennei', M.'Rustica Rubra', and M.'Alba'.

A wild flower meadow planted with ten thousand *Fritillaria meleagris* on either side, acts as a wonderful canvas, when seen at their glorious best in March/April. As the native habitats of these trees comes more and more under threat, planting on the scale that was undertaken by Mr Congreve and Mr Herman Dool all those years ago will become increasingly more important, not just to those of us involved in horticulture but to all of humanity that appreciate the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

A bluebell walk is planted with many tree ferns and *Paulownia tomentosa*. This Foxglove tree was named after Anna Paulowna, the daughter of Tsar Paul 1. When in flower, this walk is reminiscent of a Monet painting. Other interesting plants in this area are *Cunninghamia lanceolata* an exotic looking conifer from China and the rarely seen blue leaved form *C. lanceolata* 'Glauca'.

Several sweeping lawns are used to highlight tree and shrub plantings. One such area, the Rose Lawn, gently slopes and meanders through two red flowering chestnut trees and is bordered with many *Astilbes*, *Roses* and *Styrax* flowering in June and July and a fine specimen of *Cupressus cashmeriana*.

A grass path that stretches hundreds of metres is bordered with seventy wisterias trained to grow as columns. They are spectacular when in flower in early May, with companion planting of *Cistus*, *Hebe*, and *Carpentaria*, and many more summer flowering plants.

On the Bell-gate lawn stand four Magnolia trees, three of which are *Magnolia sargentiana* var. *robusta* but the other is distinctly different. Its' parent seed must have had a liaison with another species possibly *Magnolia sprengeri*, aided and abetted by a winged accomplice. This plant with its cyclamen purple buds, which open dark rose-pink, we have named after Mr John Congreve.

Through the mature trees, we grow many climbers such as *Clematis Montana*, *Clematis armandii*, *Actinidia chinensis*, *Celastrus orbiculatus*, *Hydrangea seemanii*, *Paederia scandens* and climbing roses.

In late summer and autumn a three quarter mile walk with many different cultivars of *Hydrangeas* is in full flower. This walk is planted with mainly *Hydrangea macrophylla* cultivars such as 'Altona', 'Ayesha' (flower heads like a lilac), 'Bouquet Rose', 'Brympton Mauve', 'Felton Blue', 'Gartendirecktor Kuhnert', 'Hobella', 'Holstein', 'King George', 'Lemmenhof', 'Manilla Rose', 'Masja', 'Miss Belgium', 'Nigra', 'Pia', 'Sea Foam', 'Soeur Therese', 'Veitchii' and a few *M.serrata* cultivars such as 'Beni-gaku', 'Blue Deckle', 'Miranda', and 'Preziosa'

## Woodland Garden

A fine collection of *Pieris* is held in the lower woodland garden. Their growth habits range from twenty inches to over twenty feet, from the dwarf *Pieris japonica* 'Pymaea' to the tall *Pieris formosa* var. *forrestii* 'Wakehurst'. Lily of the valley flowers are followed by new foliage emerging in many shades from salmon-pink to fire-red. The area also holds the collection of over thirty forms of *Mahonia*. This genus of plants brightens up the autumn and winter days with their racemes of yellow fragrant flowers. *Mahonia x media* 'Buckland' is one of my favourites. Coming into flower in November, it continues through till January with bright yellow heavily fragrant flowers. Since 1995 we grow the red flowering form, *Mahonia gracilipes* and its hybrid with *M.confusa* named *Mahonia x savilliana*.

The woodland garden peaks between the months of March and May with most of the *Rhododendrons* in the collection flowering in this period. Outside of this period we also have *R.*'Jenny Lind', *R.*'Nobleanum' (many forms), *R.*'Edmondii', *R.*'Fulgarb', *R.*'Shilsonii', *R.* *ririei*, *R.* *subansirense*, *R.*'Alix', *R.* *barbatum*, *R.* *montrosenum*, *R.* 'Nimrod' and many more flowering from November to February. With the arrival of July and August the late flowering *Rhododendrons* can be seen flowering such as *R.auriculatum*, *R. decorum*, *R. decorum* subsp. *diaprepes*, *R.hemsleyanum*, *R.* 'Polar Bear', and *R.serotinum*, revealing their trusses of white fragrant flowers.

The main flowering time for *Camellias* is from February to April. Two *Camellias* of interest to anyone who should like to see flowers earlier are the *C. x williamsii* 'George Blandford' and *C. japonica* 'Gloire de Nantes'. They come into flower in early December and continue in bloom till March. We also grow many forms of the winter flowering *Camellia sasanqua* that begin to flower in October/November. *C.sasanqua* 'Narumi-gata' and *C.sasanqua* 'Setsu-gekka' are two of the most reliable flowering cultivars.

A large group of *Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postill' planted under the terrace begin to reveal their flowers in December and continue to fill the winter air with their wonderfully fragrant flowers for many more weeks. A must have plant for the winter garden.

To brighten up the summer months in the woodland, over seventy-five cultivars of *Astilbes* were planted ranging in height from six inches to six feet in a wide combination of colours. Many *Geraniums*, *Hemerocallis*, *Hostas*, *Irises*, and *Kirengoshoma* are also planted in large numbers.

The many shades of autumn are revealed through plants such as *Betula*, *Euonymus*, *Enkianthus*, *Hydrangea*, *Acer*, *Azaleas*, *Cercidiphyllum*, *Carya*, *Magnolias*, *Stewartia* any many more. A favourite of mine is *Disanthus cercidifolius*, a member of the witch hazel family, which turns the most brilliant claret red and almost translucent as its rounded leaves catch the autumn sun.

A bamboo garden has over thirty varieties planted to show off the contrasting colour of the culms to great effect.

## **Walled Garden**

The walled garden is divided into two sections. One consists of a fruit and vegetable garden where much of the freshly harvested produce can be purchased on opening day. This area also contains borders planted to show off the flowers of May, June and July, such as an *Aster* border, a *Paeonia* border with climbing roses *Rosa* 'Pauls Himalayan Musk' and *Rosa* 'Veilchenblau' backed with *Delphiniums* and under planted with *Nepeta* 'Six Hill Giant'. A water lily pond is surrounded by *Gunnera*, *Agapanthus*, *Hedychiums* and many *Grasses*.

The other section of the walled garden was planted to flower in August/September with many forms of *Magnolia grandiflora*, *Hydrangea asper* subsp. *sargentiana*, *Hydrangea paniculata* (many forms), *Buddleja*, and *Hypericum* 'Rowallane'. All are under planted with herbaceous plants. The majestic walls are adorned with climbers such as *Wisteria*, *Lonicera*, *Pileostegia viburnoides*, *Schizophragma hydrangeoides*, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*.

Herbaceous plants such as *Lobelia tupa*, *Eucomis bicolor*, *Coreopsis vertilliata* and many others, border the Georgian glasshouse. A manicured lawn is the central feature of this garden. It is planted with one *Aesculus parviflora*, a summer flowering chestnut from the south eastern U.S.A and introduced into cultivation in 1785. A sloping box hedge that leads to the Bell-gate has *Tropaeolum speciosum* growing through it to great effect at flowering time.

Visit [www.mountcongreve.com](http://www.mountcongreve.com) for information