

# A gardeners' garden in the Loire

Jane Hanks looks at the diverse array of green-fingered goodies available year-round on the fabled banks of the Loire

The gardens of the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire are unique because every year there are 30 temporary gardens created by international designers on show from April to the beginning of November, as well as fifteen works of art on a nature theme.

The exhibitions are set in 32 hectares of 19th century parkland belonging to the Domaine's beautiful chateau on the banks of the Loire River and the site has been owned and run by the regional authority, the Centre-Loire Valley, since 2008.

It is open every day other than Christmas Day and New Year's Day, and there are year-round events including the Art and Nature Season and the International Garden Festival in the spring and summer, and the Chaumont-Photo-sur-Loire photography exhibitions in the autumn and winter.

The director of the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire and of the Festival international des Jardins, is Chantal Colleu-Dumond:

"Our gardens are original because I do not think there is anywhere else where you can come to see show gardens from all over the world which develop over their six month installation."

Every year three hundred candidates apply to take part, so Mrs Colleu-Dumond says the standard is always high: "The teams are multi-disciplinary, involving not only gardeners and horticulturalists but also architects and designers so there is always this combination of art, creation and planting which makes the gardens in the International Festival always so interesting to see.

"It is like having a laboratory showing what is possible and new in gardening with ideas from all over the world. In 2019, 75% of the exhibitors came from outside France, including Japan, the US, Korea, Germany and the Netherlands."

The theme was Gardens of Paradise: "A magnificent example of what garden creators can achieve was the Magpie's Paradise garden, created by the American Carrie Preston and Farhana Rasheed who are landscape architects working in the Netherlands. They created a giant magpie's nest surrounded by a beautifully planted marshy area.

"You could go into the nest and discover a magpie's stolen treasures which represent the fleeting magical moments of everyday life which contribute to our own paradise, such as the perfect cup of tea, a



Chaumont is an exceptional setting for a garden festival, on the banks of the Loire river

conversation you have with the one you love or the first bite of a crisp apple."

For the Art and Nature season, Chantal Colleu-Dumond chooses 15 new works of art each year which can be discovered throughout the grounds: "You really need to spend at least a day here to enjoy all that is on offer. We even have a two-day ticket. It is not just an ordinary visit to a garden but an experience. You can enjoy both the natural surroundings of the parkland and see the ways in which humans can transform nature."

There is plenty of interest for more traditional gardeners, away from the artistic creations. There is a collection of climbing roses and one of peonies. There is a shaded walk, the water garden, greenhouses with tropical plants and one with unusual plants. There are permanent gardens representing classic styles from other parts of the world, including a Chinese, Japanese, Korean and English garden. You can even sign up for gardening workshops, and many of the plants you will see as you stroll through are labelled.

"There is something different to see all through the year," says Chantal Colleu-Dumond. "In winter you can visit the greenhouses and we have a winter garden

with evergreens and trees with brightly coloured bark. In the Spring there are 160,000 white bulbs, either narcissus or tulips which come into flower."

She also says that they hope to inspire gardeners: "We want it to be accessible for those who are experts in art and gardening, but also for those who are not and just want to explore a new world. One of our hopes is that visitors will take away ideas for their own gardens, and if they come back another time they will find new inspiration as we are always coming up with new ideas. I am very enthusiastic about the gardens and their possibilities."

And another important point: "We always make sure the gardens are perfectly maintained. A team of twelve, exceptionally dedicated gardeners work extremely hard to make sure the gardens always look at their best."

The Park and International Garden Festival of Chaumont-sur-Loire are listed as both a Remarkable Gardens and Remarkable Trees site and the 2018

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Michelin Green Guide to the Châteaux of the Loire awarded the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire three stars. This year they were proud to receive First Prize in the Special Award category in the 2019/2020 European Garden Award given by the European Garden Heritage Network which looks at gardens in 14 countries. "We were really happy to have European recognition for our garden", said Mrs Colleu-Dumond.  
[www.domaine-chaumont.fr](http://www.domaine-chaumont.fr)

## Open Gardens charity success

The Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts scheme which encourages gardeners to open up their gardens to raise money for charities, was able to give €17,500 to five French children's charities from its 2019 season. The main beneficiary, as in previous years, was A Chacun Son Everest, which helps children and women who have had cancer.

When Open Gardens President, Karen Roper (pictured inset, far left) handed over the cheques she said it was a pleasure to hear how the money would be used: "A Chacun son Everest" will use it to help create their own new garden and Quelquechose de Plus, a centre for young people with disabilities, used money last year for a revolving table at wheelchair height so residents could grow herbs and vegetables. It is nice to see money going back into the many benefits gardening can bring."

There were fewer gardens open than in 2018, but Mrs Roper says this is not a worry: "There are several explanations. Brexit did not help and many people have gone back to the UK. There was the drought and some older gardeners can no longer open, so we hope more gardeners will join us in 2020. We also welcome non-gardening members to help with publicity or take tickets or serve teas."

2019 tickets will be valid until March 2020 when new annual tickets will be available for €15.

Day tickets will no longer be a fixed €5 but may be more for a garden of special interest or a group, or less for one small garden. "It will never be expensive," says Mrs Roper. "The idea is to raise money for a good cause through gardening."

[www.opengardens.eu](http://www.opengardens.eu)

## Green news

### Buying forests to preserve them

An animal association in the rugged and wild Vercors massif (Isère and Drôme) is raising money to buy up land in order to protect it from development.

12% of this region of exceptional natural heritage (pictured) is already classified by the State as a nature reserve, but the Association for the Protection of Wild Animals (Aspas) is hoping to buy 500 hectares. So far it has raised €600,000 from small donors but it requires €2.3million, and has approached private foundations and launched online campaigns.

"Why are we buying? It is to preserve and to avoid the creation of trails and the exploitation of wood," said Aspas member Madline Rubin.



Photo: Pixabay

### Protests against Europacity project

Protesters have rallied against the proposed creation by 2027 of the massive Europacity leisure and shopping complex on agricultural land at Gonesse, Val-d'Oise.

The €3billion project, funded by the Auchan group and its Chinese partner Wanda, aims to build a museum, exhibition centres, concert halls, aquatic centre, leisure park and thousands of hotel rooms. They expect 31 million visitors a year, and plan to create up to 10,000 jobs.

However, opponent of the project, Bernard Loup, said: "They will hire throughout the Ile-de-France region, which will not reduce the unemployment rate in these [Gonesse] municipalities by even a tenth."

### In search of zero-carbon steak

An engineer-turned-organic cattle farmer in Manche, Normandy, is aiming to pro-

duce zero-carbon beef on his farm.

Nicolas Onfroy is part of the European "life beef carbon" project, whose goal is to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from livestock farming. His 229-strong cattle herd is fed exclusively on grass, heating is by wood-burning instead of oil or gas, and the cows' barn is covered with solar panels.

Crucially, the price of Mr Onfroy's zero carbon beef is the same as any other beef, and between a third and a quarter is sold directly to the public at the farm.

### Get on yer bike in Vaucluse

Authorities in Vaucluse hope to double the number of regular cyclists on departmental roads to 370,000 by 2025.

As well as increasing the number of places to park a bike, it also will launch new cycle routes: between Avignon and Carpentras via the Spirou and Wave Island theme parks; the Ouvèze cycle

route; and the link between the Via Rhôna and the Mediterranean.

In the capital Avignon there are plans to add 1,000 bike locking places next year.

### Go green and save on your carte grise

The *carte grise* (*Certificat d'immatriculation* or vehicle registration) in the Hauts-de-France region will be free to those buying an electric, hybrid or ethanol-powered vehicle by January 1 2020, – despite it being a loss-making move for regional coffers.

Announcing the measure, Regional President Xavier Bertrand, said: "For the region it is a loss of income, but I sincerely believe that it is worthwhile to support the transition to clean vehicles.

"This ecological awareness in French society is not a fad. The young people are lecturing us and they are right, because in 10 years it will be too late," he added.