

Woolbeding Gardens – a modern masterpiece

Quietly tucked away in the valley of the River Rother lies one of the most beautiful gardens in Sussex. Woolbeding is a modern masterpiece featuring colourful borders, a landscape garden and a collection of follies.

Woolbeding Gardens is a world away from many of the grand historic gardens the National Trust cares for, and a visit here is more akin to a tour of a private garden. Special viewing arrangements mean that visitors book in advance, and are driven to the gardens twice a week via regularly running shuttle buses. This allows the gardens to retain a feeling of intimacy and tranquillity, and gives the visitors more of a 'personal' experience.

Woolbeding is also unusual in that it is constantly changing. Experimentation with planting has given this garden a reputation as a 21st-century masterpiece that always has something new to reveal. A garden of two halves, the formal gardens are broken up into 'rooms', each with a different colour theme, from vibrant reds to pastel pinks, using a combination of rare and not-so-rare flowering plants. The quality of the planting means this is both a plantsman's garden as well as a garden for anyone who enjoys gorgeous horticultural shape and colour.

When you arrive, you will be welcomed into the Entrance Garden which was formally the old farmyard but now has a Mediterranean feel, with formal water pools surrounded by African lilies and olive trees.

At the heart of the garden are the West Borders. A palette of blue, white and pale yellow, roses, tulips and forget-me-nots carefully line the avenue, perfectly framing the view beyond the gates into the countryside. The walls are full of climbing

roses and the borders are bursting with bloom in full season.

Wander through the well garden and into the fountain garden where you'll find one of Woolbeding's hidden gems, and a mass of colour from rich pinks and splashes of blue to sunset oranges. The herb garden features a sundial at the centre and spiralling topiary balls alongside English apples climbing up the walls. In season, the beds are filled with lavender, thyme and plenty of offerings for the kitchen.

Beyond the garden, a gentle stroll over open pasture land provides idyllic views of the River Rother, and leads to all sorts of picturesque delights such as the quirky Tulip Folly, which is surrounded by glorious views, and space in which to picnic and relax.

Take the steps down from the Tulip Folly and walk along by the River Rother. Here you'll find meadows of buttercups, daises and foxgloves growing wildly into the sweeping landscape. Walk slowly along the hornbeam tunnel and admire the trees, twisting at every turn.

Wander through the kissing gate and enjoy picturesque views over the river towards the long walk. Navigate your way along rustic woody paths to reveal a gothic summerhouse where you'll find the River God grotto, waterfall, Chinese bridges, secret sculptures and hidden views.



The 26-acre garden was the creation of Mr Simon Sainsbury and Stewart Grimshaw. With the help of notable garden designers Lanning Roper in the 1980s and the Bannermans in the late 1990s, Woolbeding has developed into the stunning contemporary creation you see today. Woolbeding is a private garden so visitors won't find any plant labels. Instead, they'll find friendly and knowledgeable gardeners who are always happy to answer questions and offer advice.

Woolbeding Gardens has sumptuous displays throughout the year. In spring, enjoy bright splashes of bulb colour, as well as azaleas, hellebores and early flowering perennials. In summer, the stars of the show are the summer borders, fragrant roses, the potager, vegetable garden, and herb garden. In autumn, it's the turn of the trees and shrubs in the Long Walk, as well as late flowering perennials.

Woolbeding Gardens has an 'orchid greenhouse' in the garden, containing the incredible 40 year old collection of orchids

lovingly amassed by Woolbeding's previous tenants, benefactors and creators of the garden – Simon Sainsbury and Stewart Grimshaw. Surrounded by wildflowers and seating, the greenhouse contains over 120 varieties of orchid. Visitors can enter this exotic floral sanctuary during normal opening hours.

Enjoy views of Woolbeding's new folly, overlooking the garden from the parkland. Constructed of local Fittleworth stone and built in memory of Simon Sainsbury, it was designed by Richard Lincoln to complement the Tulip Temple which stands close to the main lawn.



A new 25m x 4m border has been created in the Greenhouse Garden, which will look glorious in summer. The border was designed in-house by the garden team and has been planted using a wide range of large leaf plants, as well as bright oranges, reds and yellows to complement the rest of the existing greenhouse garden. There is a 'tropical' bed

featuring architectural plants with bold foliage, ferns and hostas, as well as a more herbaceous bed, and a gravel bed containing Aloes and Agaves.

Woolbeding Gardens' new orchard produces a riot of colour from April until June from 5,000 mixed bulbs planted in long grass such as narcissus, casmassia, eremurus and alliums. Mature fruit trees give instant impact – there are 18 apple trees of three different varieties and five trained conference pear trees, filling the orchard with fruit blossom in April and May. A mill stone table lies in the centre of the orchard for people to sit around and picnic, or simply indulge in the sights and sounds of the orchard.

This enchanting garden is a haven for horticultural enthusiasts, who can also pick up expert gardening tips at Woolbeding's series of technical workshops. The enticing-sounding topics include an introduction to the world of orchids, how to create gorgeous summer containers, and propagation for beginners. All workshops cost just £18 including admission to the garden, and refreshments on arrival.

If you want to sit down and indulge in the beauty of the garden around you, then the pretty 19th-century style French themed Orchard Café is the perfect place in which to do this. Providing a range of sandwiches, homemade cakes and barista coffee, its wood-burning stove gives it a cosy feel on chillier days, whilst cool drinks and ice creams are the perfect treat for warm summer days. You'll also find a pretty selection of gifts on offer, from gardening books to plants.

These wonderful gardens can now accommodate coach groups of up to 55 people at a time, and you can book an introductory welcome talk for your group, from one of the senior members of the garden team. Whilst the cosy Orchard Café is on hand for delicious treats, and picnics are welcome in the garden, groups can also pre-book a luxurious afternoon cream tea.

Bookings can be made on 0844 249 1895. Please check out the voucher on our [website](#).

Woolbeding Gardens re-opens on 7th April 2016 and as they are without a visitor car park, there is a complimentary park and ride scheme on hand to take you from nearby Midhurst and drop you directly outside Woolbeding Gardens. Open on Thursdays and Fridays only. For more information or to pre-book your visit, call 0844 249 1895 or visit the website at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/woolbeding-gardens.