

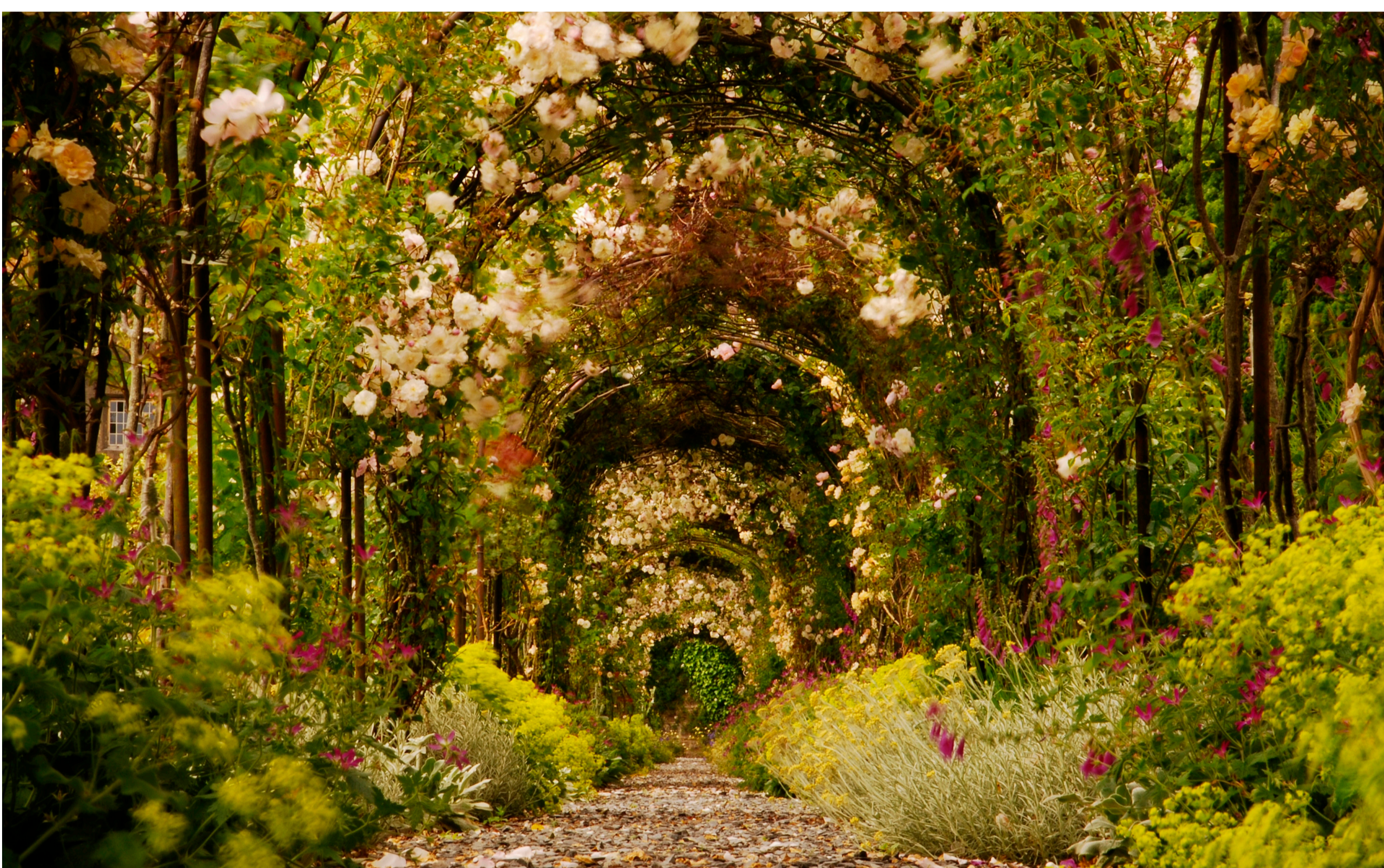


Meet Ben Ruscombe-King

As Head Gardener at Hotel Endsleigh, Ben Ruscombe-King talks about its glorious gardens overlooking the River Tamar and designed by Humphry Repton.

Portrait Paul Massey

Nestling among green slopes on the edge of Dartmoor, gracious Hotel Endsleigh was once the hunting lodge of the Duke of Bedford. Set in 108 acres of gardens, woodlands, follies and grottoes created more than two hundred years ago by Humphry Repton, it is unique in that it is largely unchanged from his original design. We talk to Head Gardener Ben Ruscombe-King about curating the legacy of Repton's vision, 'champion' trees and his favourite part of this exquisite Eden.



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Ben Ruscombe-King

Ben Ruscombe-King, the Endsleigh Gardener

As a gardener, what's your background and where did you work before Hotel Endsleigh?

I studied at Capel Manor College and worked in various London Parks as well as for the charity 'Trees for Cities' before returning to Cornwall to work on the refurbishment of Trewarthenick, a Repton-designed garden near Tregony. I moved to Endsleigh in 2015 and have been uncovering it ever since.

The garden was designed by Humphry Repton in the 19th century. How much of the original design is still present, and have there been any major changes by subsequent owners?

Endsleigh was Repton's last major commission and is quite unique in that most of the original design was carried out and has been left largely intact. There have been no major interventions in subsequent years. For Repton the combining of rocky outcrops with the sound of running water was the key to unlocking Endsleigh's 'Picturesque Beauty'. The irrigation system that feeds the rills, streams, cascades, waterfalls and fountains still functions as it did and is a masterpiece in the manipulation of water, creating a soundtrack to the garden.

How big is the gardening team at Hotel Endsleigh?

There are currently four gardeners at Endsleigh, though we are recruiting for another member of the team currently.

On your website it mentions that some of the trees in the arboretum are unusual ones from around the world, and they are national champions. Can you tell us a bit more about them?

The original owners of Endsleigh, the Dukes of Bedford, were all in turn great plant collectors and the garden became a repository for trees from all over the globe. We have some of the first *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, (one of which is a former Champion and mentioned in Hilliers as a fine specimen), *Sequoia sempervirens* and *Pseudotsuga menziesii* brought back to Britain many deemed 'Remarkable' by The Tree Register. A Pinetum was added to the gardens by the 11th Duke after the First World War with many newly discovered conifers being planted at that time.

We have 17 trees recorded as champion trees in the tree register here including: *Acer oliverianum*; *Aesculus indica*; *Catalpa bungei*; *Cedrus deodara* 'Aurea'; *Cephalotaxus fortunei*; *Chamaecyparis formosensis*; *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Lycopodioides'; *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Nana'; *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Filicoides'; *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Squarrosa'; *Chamaecyparis thyoides*; *Diospyros virginiana*; *Kalopanax septemlobus* var. *maximowiczii*; *Taxodium distichum* 'Aureum'; *Rhododendron* 'Endsleigh Pink'.

We also have a contender for the shortest lived champion tree. A *Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula' was named Champion in 2017 the day after the title was confirmed the tree lost its top in strong wind, the tree is still standing but we have had to remove quite a lot of weight to preserve the tree.

What's your favourite part of the garden?

The Dell is probably my favourite part of the garden; it is managed with a fairly light touch and consequently has a bit of magic and mystery to it. The joy of the gardens though is that there is a bit of everything: long border; shrubbery; parterre; rose walk; rockery; and it's always important to indulge as many different facets of gardening as possible.



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