

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Prince Charles has spent more than three decades creating the magnificent garden at Highgrove, his 18th-century country house in Gloucestershire. As we begin an exclusive two-week series following a gardening year there, he reveals what inspired him

FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE that I have been at Highgrove for 34 years. During that time I have tried to enhance the landscape and the setting of the house; I have tried to create a structure and a framework through the judicious use of hedges, avenues and topiary. Half the battle about making a garden is to ensure there is something interesting to look at in the winter months, so geometrical shapes and patterns help a great deal – particularly when viewed from the windows of the house. Long shadows cast by avenues and hedges in the winter sun are, to my mind, an essential, rewarding feature of a garden set in its landscape.

I suppose, when I think about it, I have gardened to a certain extent from a painter's perspective. Each part of the garden is a separate 'painting' and the result of ceaseless walking, ruminating and observing those moments of magic when the light becomes almost dreamlike in its illuminating intensity. It is in those moments when you are lost in wonder that such beauty is possible and inspiration can come in terms of the positioning of new plantings of trees, shrubs and flowers or, for that matter, of architectural features that catch the eye.

I think I learnt quite quickly that placing anything in a garden can easily go wrong if you rush at it, so I have tried never to force a plan or design, but to wait for an 'intuitive' idea to form itself when the moment is right. I have found this of particular value when agonising over where to place pieces of sculpture, for instance. I have been most fortunate over the years to have been given all sorts of things by a succession of generous individuals, organisations, societies, craftsmen and sculptors and it has often taken several years before their correct setting dawned on me.

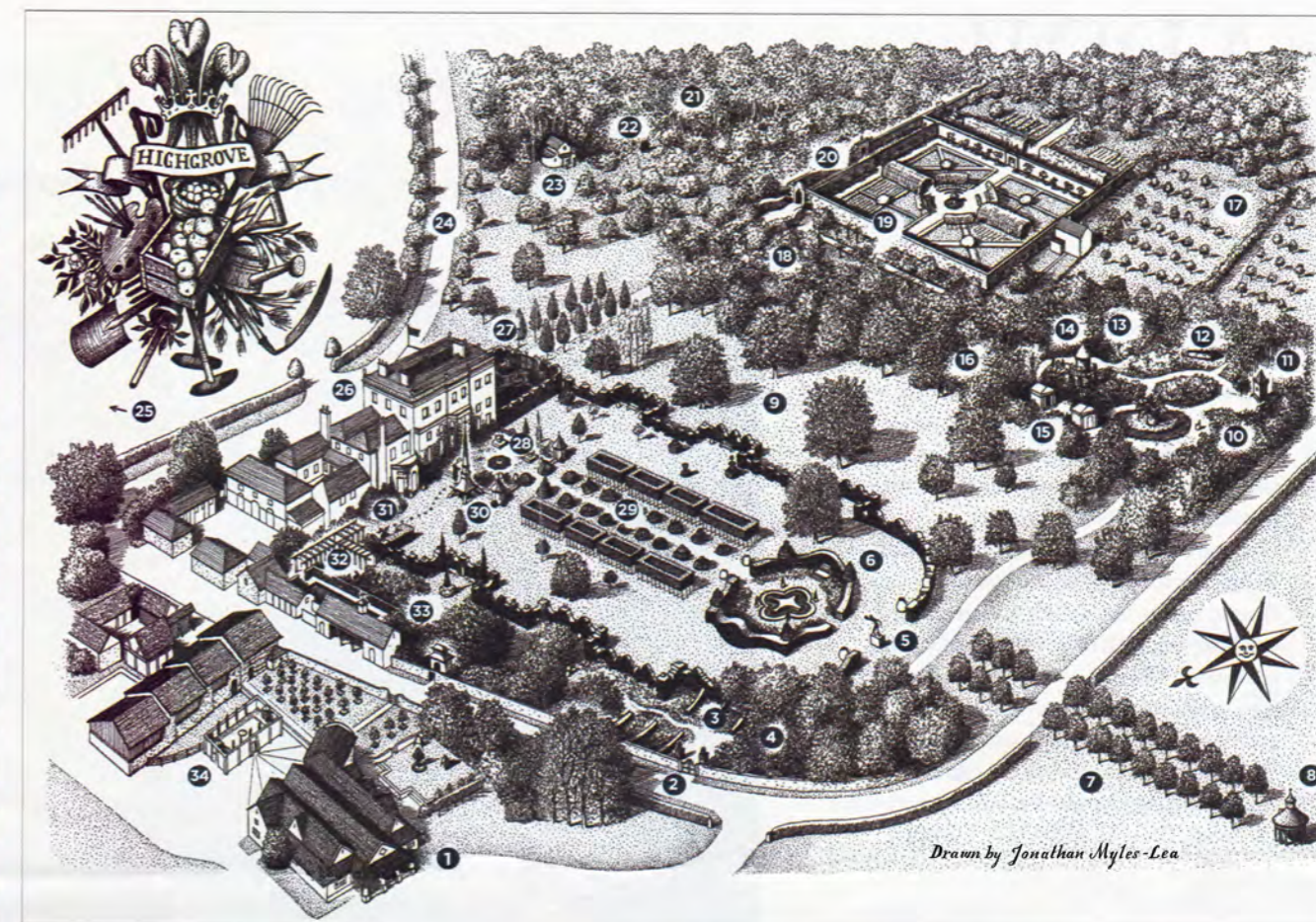
It is perhaps important, too, to note that much of the garden is the result of my interest in, and patronage of, a whole host of different organisations that have so kindly responded to my particular enthusiasms or desire to protect endangered varieties of plant, vegetable, fruit, tree, shrub or farm animal. It is worth stressing that I found myself growing up at a time when so much that had been carefully and lovingly developed, bred, nurtured and improved over thousands of years of trial and error was being callously and rashly discarded. Thank God there were various far-sighted people in this country who had taken the trouble to set up organisations to try to save something from this carnage of fashionable vandalism.

Now, of course, people are beginning to realise that all these things have an intrinsic value and are crucial to our long-term survival. So it has been with the mutual help and support of these organisations and individuals that my garden has taken shape, whether in the establishment of orchards of rare varieties of apple, in the planting of increasingly rare heritage varieties of vegetable, in the development of wild flower meadows and the national collection of beeches and hostas, or in the preservation of critically endangered breeds of farm animals.

In many ways, the garden at Highgrove represents one very small attempt to heal the appallingly short-sighted damage done to the soil, the landscape and to our own souls. Some may not like it, others may scoff that it is not in the 'real world' or is merely an expensive indulgence. Whatever the case, my enduring hope is that those who visit the garden may find something to inspire, excite, fascinate or soothe them. ▶



Prince Charles in the cottage garden, where he works in the newly built summerhouse, right, in showery weather. Above right: a plan of Highgrove



Drawn by Jonathan Myles-Lea

- KEY**
- 1 Orchard Room
 - 2 Garden Entrance
 - 3 Buttress Garden
 - 4 Laurel Tunnel
 - 5 Borghese Gladiator
 - 6 Lily Pool Garden
 - 7 Lime Avenue
 - 8 Dovecote
 - 9 Wild Flower Meadow
 - 10 Boundary of Stumpery including:
 - 11 Temple of Worthies
 - 12 Wall of Gifts
 - 13 Japanese Moss Garden
 - 14 Tree House
 - 15 Temples
 - 16 End of Stumpery
 - 17 Lower Orchard
 - 18 Winterbourne Garden
 - 19 Kitchen Garden
 - 20 Azalea Walk
 - 21 Arboretum
 - 22 Daughters of Odessa
 - 23 Sanctuary
 - 24 Front Drive
 - 25 Avenue
 - 26 Front of House
 - 27 Sundial Garden
 - 28 Terrace Garden
 - 29 Thyme Walk
 - 30 Oak Pavilion
 - 31 Acid Bed
 - 32 Rose Pergola
 - 33 Cottage Garden
 - 34 Carpet Garden



Charles

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