



Above: Winter textures
Right: The Chinese Pavilion



Winter *at* WISLEY

Wrap up warmly and admire jewel-bright berries, rainbow stems and fragrant flowers, says Adrienne Wyper

In the dead of winter, when your own patch is likely to be 'resting' and not looking its best, it's inspiring to visit a garden that comes into its own on a cold, crisp day, sparkling with frost.

Wisley is the oldest of the Royal Horticultural Society's gardens, acquired in 1903. Its sculptural forms and seasonal colour make it one of the best days out of the winter gardening calendar. And with one of the world's largest plant collections, in 60 acres, there's a lot of ground to cover.

Constructed in 1910, the naturalistic Rock Garden, with many small paths, pools and waterfalls, is one of Wisley's oldest features, and is home to a real winter highlight, the cloud-pruned Japanese larch, probably its oldest plant, set amid dwarf conifers.

More recently, the Exotic Garden opened

in July 2017 to showcase the surprisingly wide range of tropical-type plants that can be grown in British gardens, some of which you'll see wrapped up to protect them from winter weather. Stone pathways weave through more than 100 species to a fountain in the form of a double lotus flower.

Retreat from chilly conditions outside into The Glasshouse, where three climatic zones covering cloud-forest, desert and tropical regions take you on a tour of the world's plants, such as tree ferns, bananas and carnivorous specimens. Until 4 March, more than 50 species of tropical butterfly will flutter freely in the tropical zone.

Outside, clipped beech hedges and cylinders echo the original cultivated area, Oakwood, which boasts the most diverse range of plants in the spirit of the original garden 'growing ▷





First signs of spring



Above: The Glasshouse Borders
Right: Jubilee Rose Garden

difficult plants successfully' in a naturalistic style.

In winter, the Seven Acres area, between the restaurant and The Glasshouse, is bright with dogwood (*Cornus*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis*), Daphne with its sweet-scented flowers, and Tibetan cherry (*Prunus serrula*) with its peeling bark. Two ponds are graced by elegant crane sculptures, with the Chinese Pavilion on the bank.

A 45-minute self-guided Seven Acres Winter Walk (download from the website or pick up a leaflet) means you won't miss a single specimen of the plants picked for their eye-catching foliage and fruits, bark and branches, and there's a useful list of all the plants you've seen so you can plan your own winter walk and head home bursting with fresh horticultural inspiration for the coming season. ■

◆ RHS Wisley, Woking, Surrey: 01483-224234, www.rhs.org.uk/Gardens/Wisley



RHS: LEIGH HUNT/JAMES ARNOLD/CAROL SHEPPARD