



# Shrub sensations!

A potted history of the rhododendron and where to see them at their best this spring. By Adrienne Wyper

**R**hododendrons first hit their popularity peak in Victorian times, when plant hunters brought them back from far-flung lands to Kew, and started a trend. Since then at least one has become a bit of a pest. Lilac-flowered *Rhododendron ponticum* has run wild, and is crowding out native woodland species.

## Grow your own

It's well known that rhododendrons like acid soil, so if checking with a soil pH kit reveals that yours is alkaline, you'll have to grow them in containers. Whatever your soil type, they need lots of watering, but not with hard tap water, which is too high in calcium.

Even when not in flower, rhododendrons are worth growing for their attractive foliage, with minute hairs resulting in hues from silvery

to rich chestnut brown.

And, wow, the flowers: blooming in spring (early varieties) through into autumn (late varieties), the colourful clusters of bell-shaped or trumpet-like flowers appear in every possible shade: pure white, pale cream, lemon yellow, warm apricot, shocking pink, deep purple and flaming scarlet, and many of these are scented.

## Go to a garden

Whether you grow them at home or not, it's worth visiting gardens renowned for their rhododendron displays, to admire the massed blooms.

Created in 1930, The Savill Garden, in the grounds of Windsor Great Park, cultivates award-winning specimens of rhododendrons, and the display in the sunken woodland garden is glorious.

Greenway, Agatha Christie's former holiday home in Devon, is renowned for its

swathes of rhododendrons sweeping down to the beautiful backdrop of the River Dart. And don't miss the eye-catching rhododendron 'Cornish Red' with twisted branches and vibrant flowers, by the tennis court. The white Georgian house and the 300-acre grounds are now looked after by the National Trust. Join a free guided garden walk every day at 2pm.

At Bodnant Garden in Conwy, some of the rhododendrons are so rare they're found nowhere else, including the low-growing *Rhododendron forestii*, whose National Collection is here. ■

♦ *The Savill Garden*, 01753-860222, [www.windsorgreat-park.co.uk/en/experiences/the-savill-garden](http://www.windsorgreat-park.co.uk/en/experiences/the-savill-garden)

♦ *Greenway*: 01803-842382, [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/greenway](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/greenway)

♦ *Bodnant Garden*, 01492-650460, [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden)



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Greenway



Rhododendron  
ponticum baeticum



Bodnant



Savill Garden