

Kew Gardens

Written by Gaia

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Kew Gardens

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia This article is about the botanical gardens in south-west London. For the non-departmental public body, see

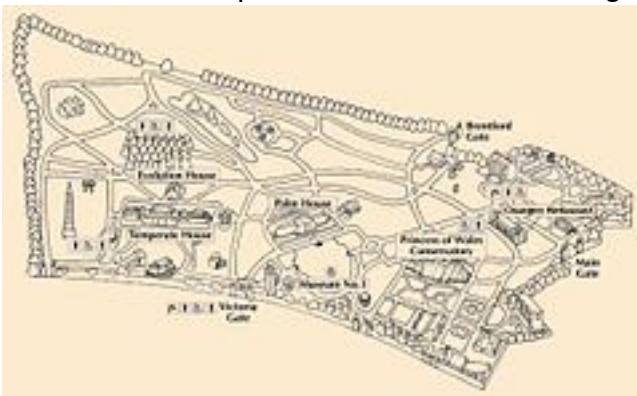
[Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#)

. For the suburb, see

[Kew, London](#)



Kew Gardens Temperate House from the Pagoda



Type	Botanical
Location	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, England
Area	121 hectares (300 acres)
Opened	1759
Visitors	more than 1.35 million per year
Species	> 30,000

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Website www.kew.org

[UNESCO World Heritage Site](#)

Kew Gardens

[Name as inscribed on the World Heritage List](#)



Type	Cultural
Criteria	ii, iii, iv
Reference	1084
UNESCO region	Europe and North America
Inscription history	
Inscription	2003 (27th Session)

Kew Gardens is a [botanical garden](#) in south-west London and houses the largest and most diverse botanical and mycological collections in the world. [1

]

Founded in 1840, from the exotic garden at Kew Park in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, UK, its living collections include more than 30,000 different kinds of plants, while the [herbarium](#), which is one of the largest in the world, has over seven million preserved plant specimens. The library contains more than 750,000 volumes, and the illustrations collection contains more than 175,000 prints and drawings of plants. It is one of London's top tourist attractions. In 2003, the gardens were put on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites.

Kew Gardens, together with the botanic gardens at Wakehurst Place in Sussex, are managed by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (brand name *Kew*), an internationally important botanical

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research and education institution that employs 750 staff, and is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

[2]

The Kew site, which has been dated as formally starting in 1759,^[3] though can be traced back to the exotic garden at Kew Park, formed by Lord Capel John of Tewkesbury, consists of 121 hectares (300 acres)^[4] of gardens and botanical glasshouses, four Grade I listed buildings and 36 Grade II listed structures, all set in an internationally significant landscape.

[5]

Kew Gardens has its own police force, Kew Constabulary, which has been in operation since 1847.

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History



The flagpole at Kew Gardens, which stood from 1959 until 2007

Kew, the area in which Kew Gardens are situated, consists mainly of the gardens themselves and a small surrounding community.^[6] Royal residences in the area which would later influence

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the layout and construction of the gardens began in 1299 when Edward I moved his court to a manor house in neighbouring Richmond (then called Sheen).

[6]

That manor house was later abandoned; however, Henry VII built Sheen Palace in 1501, which, under the name Richmond Palace, became a permanent royal residence for Henry VII.

[7]

[8]

[9]

Around the start of the 16th century courtiers attending Richmond Palace settled in Kew and built large houses.

[6]

Early royal residences at Kew included Mary Tudor's house, which was in existence by 1522 when a driveway was built to connect it to the palace at Richmond.

[6]

Around 1600, the land that would become the gardens was known as Kew Field, a large field strip farmed by one of the new private estates.

[10]

[11]

The exotic garden at Kew Park, formed by Lord Capel John of Tewkesbury, was enlarged and extended by Augusta, Dowager Princess of Wales, the widow of Frederick, Prince of Wales. The origins of Kew Gardens can be traced to the merging of the royal estates of Richmond and Kew in 1772.^[12] William Chambers built several garden structures, including the lofty Chinese pagoda built in 1761 which still remains. George III enriched the gardens, aided by William Aiton and Sir Joseph Banks.^[13] The old Kew Park (by then renamed the White House), was demolished in 1802. The "Dutch House" adjoining was purchased by George III in 1781 as a nursery for the royal children. It is a plain brick structure now known as Kew Palace.

Some early plants came from the walled garden established by William Coys at Stubbers in North Ockendon.^[14] The collections grew somewhat haphazardly until the appointment of the first collector, Francis Masson, in 1771.^[15] Capability Brown, who became England's most renowned landscape architect, applied for the position of master gardener at Kew, and was rejected.^[16]

In 1840 the gardens were adopted as a national botanical garden, in large part due to the efforts of the Royal Horticultural Society and its president William Cavendish.^[17] Under Kew's director, William Hooker, the gardens were increased to 30 hectares (75 acres) and the pleasure grounds, or arboretum, extended to 109 hectares (270 acres), and later to its present size of 121 hectares (300 acres). The first curator was John Smith.

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The Tea House at Kew Gardens after the arson attack in 1913 by suffragettes Olive Wharry and Lilian Lenton

The Palm House was built by architect Decimus Burton and iron-maker Richard Turner between 1844 and 1848, and was the first large-scale structural use of wrought iron. It is considered "*the world's most important surviving Victorian glass and iron structure.*"

[18]

[19]

The structure's panes of glass are all hand-blown. The Temperate House, which is twice as large as the Palm House, followed later in the 19th century. It is now the largest Victorian glasshouse in existence. Kew was the location of the successful effort in the 19th century to propagate rubber trees for cultivation outside South America.

In February 1913, the Tea House was burned down by [suffragettes Olive Wharry](#) and [Lilian Lenton](#)

during a series of arson attacks in London.

[20]

Kew Gardens lost hundreds of trees in the [Great Storm of 1987](#)

[21]

From 1959 to 2007 Kew Gardens had the tallest flagpole in Britain. Made from a single [Douglas-fir](#)

from Canada, it was given to mark both the centenary of the Canadian Province of [British Columbia](#)

and the bicentenary of Kew Gardens. The flagpole was removed after damage by weather and woodpeckers made it a danger.

[22]

In July 2003, the gardens were put on the list of [World Heritage Sites](#) [3] by [UNESCO](#) .

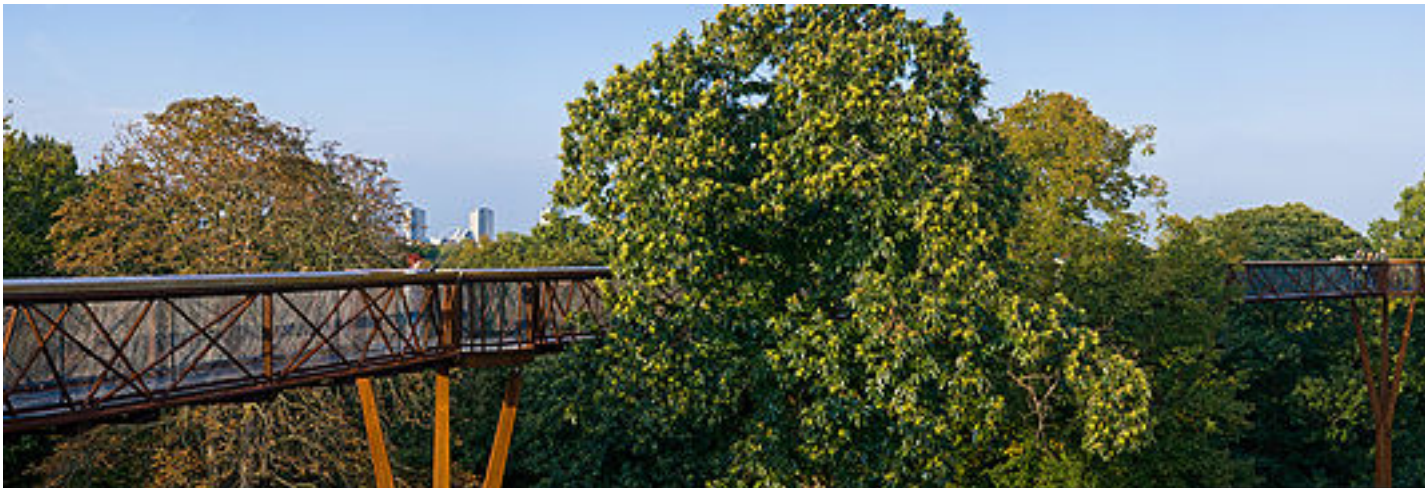
Features

Treetop walkway

A new treetop walkway opened in 2008.^[23] This walkway is 18 metres (59 ft) high and 200 metres (660 ft) long and takes visitors into the tree canopy of a woodland glade. Visitors can ascend and descend by stairs or by a lift. The floor of the walkway is made from perforated metal and flexes as it is walked upon. The entire structure sways in the wind.

The accompanying image shows a section of the walkway and the steel supports that were designed to rust to a tree-like appearance to help the walkway fit in with its surroundings.

A short film detailing the construction of the walkway is available online.^[24]



A panoramic view of the treetop walkway. It stands 18 metres (59 ft) above ground.
Sackler Crossing

The Sackler Crossing

The Sackler Crossing bridge, made of granite and bronze, opened in May 2006. Designed by Buro Happold and John Pawson, it crosses the lake and is named in honour of philanthropists

Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler.

The minimalist-styled bridge is designed as a sweeping double curve of black granite. The sides of the bridge are formed of bronze posts that give the impression, from certain angles, of forming a solid wall whereas from others, and to those on the bridge, they are clearly individual entities that allow a view of the water beyond.

The bridge forms part of a path designed to encourage visitors to visit more of the gardens than had hitherto been popular and connects the two art galleries, via the Temperate and Evolution Houses and the woodland glade, to the Minka House and the Bamboo Garden.

The crossing won a special award from the [Royal Institute of British Architects](#) in 2008.

Vehicular tour

Kew Explorer is a service that takes a circular route around the gardens, provided by two 72-seater road trains that are fuelled by Calor Gas to minimise pollution. A commentary is provided by the driver and there are several stops.

A map of the gardens is available on the Kew Gardens website.^[25]

Compost heap

Kew has one of the largest compost heaps in Europe, made from green and woody waste from the gardens and the manure from the stables of the Household Cavalry.^[26] The compost is mainly used in the gardens, but on occasion has been auctioned as part of a fundraising event for the gardens. ^[27]

The compost heap is in an area of the gardens not accessible to the public,^[26] but a viewing platform, made of wood which had been illegally traded but seized by Customs officers in HMRC, has been erected to allow visitors to observe the heap as it goes through its cycle. ^[27]

Guided walks

Free tours of the gardens are conducted daily by trained volunteers.

Plant houses

Alpine House



The Davies Alpine House in 2014

In March 2006, the Davies Alpine House opened, the third version of an alpine house since 1887. Although only 16 metres (52 ft) long the apex of the roof arch extends to a height of 10 metres (33 ft) in order to allow the natural airflow of a building of this shape to aid in the all-important ventilation required for the type of plants to be housed.

The new house features a set of automatically operated blinds that prevent it overheating when the sun is too hot for the plants together with a system that blows a continuous stream of cool air over the plants. The main design aim of the house is to allow maximum light transmission. To this end the glass is of a special low iron type that allows 90 per cent of the ultraviolet light in sunlight to pass. It is attached by high tension steel cables so that no light is obstructed by traditional glazing bars.

To conserve energy the cooling air is not refrigerated but is cooled by being passed through a labyrinth of pipes buried under the house at a depth where the temperature remains suitable all year round. The house is designed so that the maximum temperature should not exceed 20 °C (68 °F).

Kew's collection of [Alpine plants](#) (defined as those that grow above the tree line in their locale – ground level at the poles rising to over 2,000 metres (6,562 feet)), extends to over 7000. As the Alpine House can only house around 200 at a time the ones on show are regularly rotated.

Nash Conservatory

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On the West side of the Royal Botanic Gardens, this was one of the Kew Orangeries built by King William IV.



Kew Orangery

The Orangery^[28] was designed by Sir William Chambers, and was completed in 1761. It measures 28 by 10 metres (92 by 33 ft). It was found to be too dark for its intended purpose of growing citrus plants and they were moved out in 1841. After many changes of use, it is currently used as a restaurant.

Palm House



The Palm House and Parterre

The Palm House (1844–1848) was the result of cooperation between architect Decimus Burton and iron founder Richard Turner,^[29] and continues upon the glass house design principles developed by John Claudius Loudon^{[30][31]} and Joseph Paxton.^[31] A space frame of wrought iron arches, held together by horizontal tubular structures containing long prestressed cables,^[31]
^[32] supports glass panes which were originally^[29] tinted green with copper oxide to reduce the significant heating effect. The 19m high central

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nave is surrounded by a walkway at 9m height, allowing visitors a closer look upon the palm tree crowns. In front of the Palm House on the east side are the Queen's Beasts, ten statues of animals bearing shields. They are Portland stone replicas of originals done by James Woodford and were placed here in 1958.

[33]

Princess of Wales Conservatory



Princess of Wales Conservatory

Kew's third major conservatory, the Princess of Wales Conservatory, designed by architect Gordon Wilson, was opened in 1987 by Diana, Princess of Wales in commemoration of her predecessor Augusta's associations with Kew.^[34] In 1989 the conservatory received the Europa Nostra award for conservation.

^[35] The conservatory houses ten computer-controlled micro-climatic zones, with the bulk of the greenhouse volume composed of Dry Tropics and Wet Tropics plants. Significant numbers of orchids, water lilies, cacti, lithops, carnivorous plants and bromeliads are housed in the various zones. The cactus collection also extends outside the conservatory where some hardier species can be found.

The conservatory has an area of 4499 square metres. As it is designed to minimise the amount of energy taken to run it, the cooler zones are grouped around the outside and the more tropical zones are in the central area where heat is conserved. The glass roof extends down to the ground, giving the conservatory a distinctive appearance and helping to maximise the use of the sun's energy.

During the construction of the conservatory a time capsule was buried. It contains the seeds of basic crops and endangered plant species and key publications on conservation.^[35]

Rhizotron

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Inside the Temperate House



Inside the Temperate House

The Temperate House, currently closed for restoration, is a greenhouse that has twice the floor area of the Palm House and is the world's largest surviving Victorian glass structure. When in use it contained plants and trees from all the temperate regions of the world. It was commissioned in 1859 and designed by architect Decimus Burton and ironfounder Richard Turner. Covering 4880 square metres, it rises to a height of 19 metres. Intended to accommodate Kew's expanding collection of hardy and temperate plants, it took 40 years to construct, during which time costs soared. The building was restored during 2014 - 15 by Donald Insall Associates, based on their conservation management plan.^[36]

There is a viewing gallery in the central section from which visitors were able to look down on that part of the collection.

Waterlily House



The Waterlily House

The Waterlily House is the hottest and most humid of the houses at Kew and contains a large

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pond with varieties of water lily, surrounded by a display of economically important heat-loving plants. It closes during the winter months.

It was built to house the *Victoria amazonica*, the largest of the Nymphaeaceae family of water lilies. This plant was originally transported to Kew in phials of clean water and arrived in February 1849, after several prior attempts to transport seeds and roots had failed. Although various other members of the Nymphaeaceae family grew well, the house did not suit the *Victoria*, purportedly because of a poor ventilation system, and this specimen was moved to another, smaller, house.

The ironwork for this project was provided by [Richard Turner](#) and the initial construction was completed in 1852. The heat for the house was initially obtained by running a flue from the nearby Palm House but it was later equipped with its own boiler.

[37]

Ornamental buildings

Pagoda



The Pagoda

In the south-east corner of Kew Gardens stands the Great Pagoda (by Sir William Chambers),

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erected in 1762, from a design in imitation of the Chinese *Ta*. The lowest of the ten octagonal storeys is 15 m (49 ft) in diameter. From the base to the highest point is 50 m (164 ft).

Each storey finishes with a projecting roof, after the Chinese manner, originally covered with ceramic tiles and adorned with large dragons; a story is still propagated that they were made of gold and were reputedly sold by George IV to settle his debts.^[38] In fact the dragons were made of wood painted gold, and simply rotted away with the ravages of time. The walls of the building are composed of brick. The staircase, 253 steps, is in the centre of the building. During the Second World War holes were cut in each floor to allow for drop-testing of model bombs.

The Pagoda was closed to the public for many years, but was reopened for the summer months of 2006. It is now closed again but is intended to reopen under the aegis of Historic Royal Palaces in 2017.^[39]

Japanese Gateway



The Japanese Gateway (Chokushi-Mon)

Built for the [Japan-British Exhibition \(1910\)](#) and moved to Kew in 1911, the Chokushi-Mon ("Imperial Envoy's Gateway") is a four-fifths scale replica of the

[karamon](#)
(gateway) of the
[Nishi Hongan-ji](#)
temple in
[Kyoto](#)

. It lies about
140 m

west of the Pagoda and is surrounded by a reconstruction of a traditional Japanese garden.

Minka House

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Queen Charlotte's Cottage



Queen Charlotte's Cottage

Within the conservation area is a cottage that was built sometime before 1771 for Queen Charlotte by her husband George III. It has been restored by Historic Royal Palaces and is separately administered by them.^[41] It is open to the public on weekends and bank holidays during the summer.

Kew Palace



The Palace at Kew, with the sundial in the foreground

Kew Palace is the smallest of the British royal palaces. It was built by [Samuel Fortrey](#), a Dutch merchant in around 1631. It was later purchased by George III. The construction method is known as Flemish bond and involves laying the bricks with long and short sides alternating. This and the gabled front give the construction a Dutch appearance.

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To the rear of the building is the "Queen's Garden" which includes a collection of plants believed to have medicinal qualities. Only plants that were extant in England by the 17th century are grown in the garden.

The building underwent significant restoration, with leading conservation architects Donald Insall Associates, before being reopened to the public in 2006.^[42] It is administered separately from Kew Gardens, by Historic Royal Palaces.

In front of the palace is a sundial, which was given to Kew Gardens in 1959 to commemorate a royal visit. It was sculpted by Martin Holden and is a replica of one by Thomas Tompion, a celebrated 17th-century clockmaker, which had been sited near the surviving palace building since 1832 to mark the site of James Bradley's observations leading to his discovery of the aberration of light.^{[43][44]}

Galleries and museums

Admission to the galleries and museum is free after paying admission to the gardens. The International Garden Photographer of the Year Exhibition is an annual event with an indoor display of entries during the summer months.

Shirley Sherwood Gallery



The Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanic Art

The Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanic Art opened in April 2008, and holds paintings from Kew's and Dr Shirley Sherwood's collections, many of which had never been displayed to the public before. It features paintings by artists such as Georg D. Ehret, the Bauer brothers, Pierre-Joseph Redouté and Walter Hood Fitch. The paintings and drawings are cycled on a six-monthly basis. The gallery is linked to the Marianne North Gallery (see below).

Museum No. 1

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Near the Palm House is a building known as "Museum No. 1" (even though it is the only museum on the site), which was designed by Decimus Burton and opened in 1857. Housing Kew's economic botany collections including tools, ornaments, clothing, food and medicines, its aim was to illustrate human dependence on plants. The building was refurbished in 1998. The upper two floors are now an education centre and the ground floor houses the "Plants+People" exhibition which highlights the variety of plants and the ways that people use them. Due to its historical holdings, Kew is a member of The London Museums of Health & Medicine group.^[45]

The Marianne North Gallery



The Marianne North Gallery of Botanic Art

The Marianne North Gallery was built in the 1880s to house the paintings of Marianne North, an MP's daughter who travelled alone to North and South America, South Africa and many parts of Asia, at a time when women rarely did so, to paint plants. The gallery has 832 of her paintings. The paintings were left to Kew by the artist and a condition of the bequest is that the layout of the paintings in the gallery may not be altered.

The gallery had suffered considerable structural degradation since its creation and during a period from 2008 to 2009 major restoration and refurbishment took place, with works led by with leading conservation architects Donald Insall Associates.^[46] During the time the gallery was closed the opportunity was also taken to restore the paintings to their original condition. The gallery reopened in October 2009.

The gallery originally opened in 1882 and is the only permanent exhibition in Great Britain dedicated to the work of one woman.

Plant collections



The Palm House and lake to Victoria Gate

Herbaria collections

The Kew [Herbarium](#) is one of the largest in the world with approximately 7 million specimens used primarily for

[taxonomic](#)

study. The herbarium is rich in types for all regions of the world, especially the tropics, and is currently growing with 30,000 new specimen additions annually through international collaborations. The Kew Herbarium is of global importance, attracting researchers from and supporting and engaging in the science of botany all over the world, especially the field of biodiversity. A large part of the herbarium has been digitised, referred to as the Kew Herbarium Catalogue, and is available to the general public on-line.

[49]

[50]

Kew Gardens also holds other herbaria and collections of scientific importance such as a Fungarium - a herbarium for fungi -, a plant DNA bank and a seed bank.^[49]

Library and archives

The library and archives at Kew are one of the world's largest botanical collections, with over half a million items, including books, botanical illustrations, photographs, letters and manuscripts, periodicals, and maps. The Jodrell Library has been merged with the Economic Botany and Mycology Libraries and all are now housed in the Jodrell Laboratory.

Forensic horticulture

Kew provides advice and guidance to police forces around the world where plant material may provide important clues or evidence in cases. In one famous case the forensic science department at Kew were able to ascertain that the contents of the stomach of a headless corpse found in the river Thames contained a highly toxic African bean.^[51]

Economic Botany



View of the Jodrell Laboratory across part of the grass collection

The Sustainable Uses of Plants group (formerly the Centre for [Economic Botany](#)), focus on the uses of plants in the United Kingdom and the world's arid and semi-arid zones. The Centre is also responsible for curation of the Economic Botany Collection, which contains more than 90,000 botanical raw materials and ethnographic artefacts, some of which are on display in the Plants + People exhibit in Museum No. 1. The Centre is now located in the Jodrell Laboratory.^[52]

Jodrell Laboratory

The original Jodrell laboratory, named after Mr T. J. Phillips Jodrell who funded it, was established in 1877 and consisted of four research rooms and an office. Originally research was conducted into plant physiology but this was gradually superseded by botanical research. In 1934 an artists' studio and photographic darkroom were added, highlighting the importance of botanical illustration. In 1965, following increasing overcrowding, a new building was constructed and research expanded into seed collection for plant conservation. The biochemistry section also expanded to facilitate research into secondary compounds that could be derived from plants for medicinal purposes. In 1994 the centre was expanded again, tripling in size, and a decade later it was further expanded by the addition of the Wolfson Wing.^[51]

Kew Constabulary

Main article: [Kew Constabulary](#)

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The gardens have their own police force, Kew Constabulary, which has been in operation since 1847.^[53] Formerly known as the Royal Botanic Gardens Constabulary, it is a small, specialised constabulary of two sergeants and 12 officers,^[54] who patrol the grounds in a marked silver car. The Kew Constables are attested under section 3 of the Parks Regulation Act 1872, which gives them the same powers as the Metropolitan Police within the land belonging to the gardens.^{[55][56]}

Media

A number of films, documentaries and short videos have been made about Kew Gardens.^[57]

They include:

- a short colour film *World Garden* by cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth in 1942^[58]
- three series of *A Year at Kew* (2007), filmed for BBC television and released on DVD^[59]
- *Cruickshank on Kew: The Garden That Changed the World*, a 2009 BBC documentary, presented by Dan Cruickshank, exploring the history of the relationship between Kew Gardens and the British Empire^[60]
- David Attenborough's 2012 *Kingdom of Plants 3D*^[61]
- a 2003 episode of the Channel 4 TV series *Time Team*, presented by Tony Robinson, that searched for the remains of George III's palace^[62]
- a 2004 episode of the BBC Four series *Art of the Garden* which looked at the building of the Great Palm House in the 1840s.^[63]
- "Kew on a Plate", a TV programme showing the kinds of produce grown at Kew Gardens and how they can be prepared in a kitchen.
- the 2014 video game *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* contains a chapter where Holmes investigates the theft of exotic plants and a murder at Kew Gardens.

In 1921 Virginia Woolf published her short story "Kew Gardens", which gives brief descriptions of four groups of people as they pass by a flowerbed.^{[64][65]}

Access and transport

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See also



[Biology portal](#)



[Gardening portal](#)

- [List of World Heritage Sites in the United Kingdom](#)
- Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, which manages Kew Gardens and Wakehurst Place
- Wakehurst Place
- Botanists active at Kew Gardens
- Joseph Dalton Hooker, who succeeded his father as director in 1865
- The Great Plant Hunt – a primary school science initiative created by Kew Gardens, commissioned and funded by the Wellcome Trust
 - *Index Kewensis*, a massive index of plant names started and maintained by Kew Gardens
- *Kew Bulletin*, a quarterly peer-reviewed scientific journal on plant and fungal taxonomy published by [Springer Science+Business Media](#) on behalf of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

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External links

- [Official website](#)
- [BBC *A Year at Kew* documentary behind the scenes at Kew Gardens](#)