

Castles and Gardens



Scotland.
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Your Detailed Itinerary

Castles and Gardens

Day 1

Edinburgh has other, smaller gardens as well as its famous Royal Botanic Garden. For example, you can find Malleny Garden with its ancient yew trees, old-fashioned roses and dazzling herbaceous borders at Balerno on the city outskirts. Edinburgh also makes a good base for exploring other castles of the Lothians, including **Dirleton Castle**, a mediaeval fortress originally built by an Anglo-Norman family. It also has a very attractive garden below the old walls, its herbaceous plantings are at their best in high summer.

Day 2

Head over the Forth Bridge for Fife, turning east along the coast to reach the photogenic East Neuk fishing villages. Near Anstruther is **Kellie Castle**, with a walled garden worked on organic principles. Return westwards by way of Falkland Palace (A912), favourite hunting lodge of the Stuart monarchy. Continue north-

west across Fife to join the M90 for Perth and the small-scale, intimate plantings at **Branklyn Garden**.

Day 3

Continue north along the A9. **The Scottish Plant Collectors' Garden** at Pitlochry makes its tribute to more than a hundred collectors of Scottish origin or descent who discovered many of the species which are the mainstays of British gardens today.

Further north, **Blair Castle** is a historic fortress and ancestral home of the Dukes of Atholl. On the estate you can see Diana's Grove, with trees planted more than a century ago as newly introduced American conifer species. They now represent the tallest grouping of trees in the UK, with at least 20 above 150ft (46m), including several British record breakers.

Then return briefly south to take the A827 west for Aberfeldy. Beyond the town on one side of the Tay is **Castle Menzies**, while on the other is **Bolfracks**, a country-house garden demonstrating the sheer range of plants which can be grown in Perthshire's temperate climate.

Continue west by Loch Tay. Look for signposts to **Ben Lawers**, above the loch, noted for its alpine plants. Further on, **Finlarig Castle** is a ruined fortress in Killin at the west end of Loch Tay.

Day 4

Continue west through Glen Dochart, via Crianlarich and Tyndrum (A85) to reach Loch Awe. **Kilchurn Castle**, a former Campbell stronghold with a four-storey tower and the first purpose-built barracks in Scotland, offers magnificent views over loch and mountain. Then continue to Oban, with **Dunstaffnage Castle** – the temporary prison of Flora MacDonald in 1746 – as another option on the way.

Day 5

Take the A816 south from Oban. Among the garden options in the vicinity is An Cala, with its meandering streams, winding paths, Poulsen roses, Japanese cherry trees and banks of Ghent azaleas. The garden, set snugly into a horseshoe of surrounding cliffs, overlooks Easdale Island with its fascinating slate-mining heritage. Noting **Carnasserie Castle**, a 16th century tower-house, seen from the main road south, continue down, via the prehistoric sites in Kilmartin Glen, to the ferry across Loch Fyne near Tarbert, reaching Cowal at Portavadie. Drive east on the A8003/A886 by the lovely Kyles of Bute, taking the ferry at Colintraive for the Isle of Bute.

Day 6

Visit **Mount Stuart**, a grand Gothic stately home five miles south of Rothesay, set in gardens built on a grand scale. Return to the mainland via the Colintraive ferry again, taking the scenic road east (A886/A815) for Dunoon and the **Benmore Botanic Garden**, one of the most spectacular on the western seaboard. If time permits, this tour can be continued southward via the Dunoon-Gourock ferry connection for Ayrshire and the island of Arran, reached by ferry from Ardrrossan. The rhododendron collection at **Brodick Castle** is world-famous.

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It may be a paradox how often Scotland's castles, associated with past warfare, today feature the more peaceable theme of gardens. But whether or not a castle has a garden, heritage and horticulture can easily be combined on a single trip – simply because Scotland has plenty of both. Castles here range from stately homes to ruined fortresses and gardens from grand designs to small-scale plantings.



1 DIRLETON CASTLE – This ruinous mediaeval castle overlooks Dirleton village green and features a Victorian style garden, with ancient yews and a 17th century bowling green.



2 KELLIE CASTLE – Mostly 17th century and restored in Victorian times, this castle also overlooks an attractive walled garden, where flowers and vegetables thrive.



3 BRANKLYN GARDEN – Branklyn is simply one of Scotland's finest smaller gardens. Blue Meconopsis poppies are a speciality, also alpines and rhododendron all in a superb setting.



4 EXPLORERS GARDEN Themed to acknowledge the Scottish plant collectors and their travels worldwide. Beautiful landscaping and design with outdoor sculpture and artworks.



5 BLAIR CASTLE – The home of the Dukes of Atholl, Blair Castle has notable collections of furniture and weaponry, plus outstanding tree specimens in its grounds.



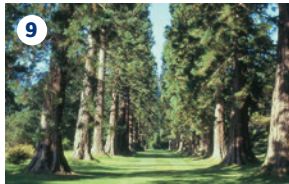
6 CASTLE MENZIES – The 16th century restored Castle near Aberfeldy is part old-style Z-plan classic Scottish fortress and part mansion house. Now a centre for the Clan Menzies.



7 A WALK ON BEN LAWERS – The Ben Lawers range is noted for its alpine plants. Discover some of them on a nature trail starting from the National Nature Reserve car park on the hill road off the A827.



8 MOUNT STUART – A fine example of domestic architecture from Britain's 19th century Gothic revival, this lavish building is set in mature parkland and gardens.



9 BENMORE BOTANIC GARDEN Stretching along a Cowal hillside, this garden has a wide-ranging collection of trees and shrubs including a spectacular avenue of giant redwood trees.



10 BRODICK CASTLE – The castle offers 600 years of history, magnificent collections of silver, porcelain and paintings, extensive gardens and stunning views over Brodick Bay to the Ayrshire Coast.