

JUNE 2026

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## The LOUD & PROUD Issue

HOMES | FOOD | CULTURE | PEOPLE | WELLBEING | STYLE

**Island Hall**  
Courtesy of Grace Vane Percy



One of the best bits of gardening advice I've ever had, came from the internationally renowned designer David Stevens, who told me to visit as many open gardens as possible to get ideas and advice from garden owners whose experience and 'experiments' you can learn from. Pay attention to your neighbourhood gardens too and you'll soon see which plants will grow well in your garden.

Next year, the National Garden Scheme (NGS) will celebrate its 100th anniversary. In 1926, a Queen's Nursing Institute council member, Miss Elsie Wagg, had the notion to ask private garden owners to charge visitors a shilling to raise funds for district nurses. The nation's obsession with gardening was as prevalent back then as it is today, and in 1927 nearly 600 gardens opened, raising £8,191. In 2025, the NGS raised a record £3,875,596 for good causes. You don't have to look very far to find a garden in the famed 'yellow book' opening near you.

**Island Hall, Godmanchester**  
**May 31, 10.30am - 4.30pm**

Step away from the hubbub of Godmanchester's Post Street into the welcoming courtyard of Island Hall, and you're immediately transported to another world. The house, built in the late 1740s, holds many rich and interesting stories inside its walls, and the tranquil garden, stretching down to the River Ouse, makes it a truly magical place for a wedding or special celebration. Opening their garden on Sunday May 31, I

**"I am more myself in a garden than anywhere else on Earth," says retired nurseryman and author Doug Green. Velvet's Melanie Taylor shares the inspiration to be found behind the gates of local gardens opening for charity this summer**

had a sneak preview during a tour of the house and garden by Christopher Vane Percy, the celebrated interior designer, whose elder daughter Grace, is now the custodian of this magnificent house, and who generously embraces visitors in the garden she and her husband share with their young family. "We're delighted to be hosting Island Hall's 34th annual opening for the NGS," says Grace. "The family and our dedicated team work very hard to get the garden ready for the community to enjoy. It's lovely to be following the longstanding tradition set by my parents in sharing the pleasures of our beautiful garden and celebrating the hall's historic roots."

The garden at Island Hall has some formal planting with clipped box parterres and pyramidal yews. Grace planted a vibrant new crinkle-crinkle herbaceous long border in 2024. The lawn then sweeps down to the river reaching out into the borrowed landscape beyond. A replica of the 18th Century Chinese bridge spans the river and takes visitors onto a two-acre island covered in wildflowers. Looking across to the 300-acre Port Holme water meadow, the landscape hasn't changed for centuries, save for the telegraph poles and the distant rumble

of the train line. It's hard to imagine we're looking at the same vista Samuel Pepys described in his diary on Sunday 14 July 1661, when he wrote about walking round Port Holme, with his father after dinner and 'viewed all the fields which was very pleasant.'

Christopher planted the garden 42 years ago, so it's surprising to learn that the Elm Avenue is only about 15 years old. The original avenue of Huntingdon elms was lost during the 1920s so Christopher replanted them with Princeton elms, *Ulmus americana* 'Princeton', which are resistant to disease.

Climate change is taking its toll on the garden today, with *viburnums* and *philadelphus* having been lost to the flooding in recent years, which has also sadly decimated the family's collection of Crimean snowdrops. With a similar poignancy to the poppy fields of Flanders, snowdrops symbolised peace and Christopher's ancestor, like many soldiers of the time, carried bulbs home from the war.

Christopher offers some great advice when moving into a new home: "Always plant the garden first," he says, "don't spend two, three or four years doing up the house and then look at the garden, you'll waste



Island Hall  
Courtesy of Grace Vane Percy



Island Hall  
Courtesy of Grace Vane Percy



Burwell Village Gardens  
Courtesy of Cambridgeshire NGS



Left and here, Thurlow Hall  
Courtesy of Suffolk NGS

so much time. Instead get the garden organised first and then when the house is finished, you'll be surprised at how mature your garden already looks." Godmanchester Community Nursery will be running a plant sale, and homemade teas will be made by and sold in support of St Mary's Church. Adults £6.50, children free, sociable dogs on leads welcome. See [islandhall.com](http://islandhall.com)

### Higham Open Gardens and Summer Tea

**May 30, 2pm - 5pm**

A group of 10 gardens in Higham near Bury St Edmunds, opening in support of the repairs to St Stephen's Church. Adults £7, children free. Cash only. Please note: no dogs or loos. Teas served in the church from 2.30pm – 4.30pm. See [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)

### Great Thurlow Hall

**June 7, 2pm - 5pm**

After enjoying February's snowdrops, I can't wait to return to Great Thurlow Hall on June 7 to see the herbaceous borders and rose garden. Adults £7, children free. Visitors can also enjoy the open studios at the Curwen Print Study Centre housed in the grounds. See [ngs.org.uk/great-thurlow-hall-suffolk-an-english-idyll](http://ngs.org.uk/great-thurlow-hall-suffolk-an-english-idyll) and [curwenprintstudy.co.uk](http://curwenprintstudy.co.uk)

### Burwell Open Gardens

**June 7, noon - 5pm**

A group opening of small, modern and larger traditional gardens brimming with imaginative planting ideas to inspire us at

home. A combined ticket for all the Burwell gardens costs £10 for adults, children free. See [ngs.org.uk/gardens/burwell-village-gardens-cb2](http://ngs.org.uk/gardens/burwell-village-gardens-cb2)

### Hidden Gardens of Bury

**June 14, 11am - 5pm**

Ever wondered what lies behind the historic walls of Bury St Edmunds? Treat your dad to a lovely Father's Day out exploring the secret patios, borders, lawns and vegetable plots of Bury's Hidden Gardens trail. Enjoy the garden party atmosphere of the 25 gardens opening for St Nicholas Hospice Care. Available online or from the gazebo on Angel Hill on the day, combined tickets are £8 for adults, children free. See [hiddengardens.co.uk](http://hiddengardens.co.uk)

### Columbine Hall, Stowupland, Stowmarket

**June 14 and September 20, 1pm - 5pm**

Enjoy a relaxing afternoon in the five acres of gardens surrounding the stunning medieval moated manor house. Adults £7, under 16s free. Dogs on leads welcome. See [columbinehall.co.uk/open-gardens](http://columbinehall.co.uk/open-gardens)

### Brampton Manor Care Home

**June 25, 1.30pm - 4pm**

A short walk from Newmarket town centre, Brampton Manor Care Home is hosting its third garden opening for the NGS on Thursday June 25. Guests are warmly invited to come and enjoy the gardens which are lovingly tended by the residents and staff. Admission is £4 for adults, children free. The team hope to welcome

over a 100 visitors through the doors, so please do go along and support them. See [ngs.org.uk/gardens/brampton-manor-care-home-cb8](http://ngs.org.uk/gardens/brampton-manor-care-home-cb8)

### Letchworth Village Gardens

**June 28, 11am - 5pm**

Where better to visit open gardens than in the world's very first garden city? More than 20 Letchworth gardens will open, raising funds for the British Red Cross and Garden House Hospice Care. A free shuttle bus from the Town Hall car park will ferry visitors between gardens so you can enjoy a relaxed day out without parking woes. Advance tickets priced £10 available from June 1; on the day, they are priced £13 each or £25 for two. See [letchworth-vog.org](http://letchworth-vog.org)

### Quy Hall, Stow-cum-Quy

**July 10, 10.30am - 1pm**

Gearing up to open for the NGS next year, Quy Hall was bought in 1855 by Clement Francis, a Cambridge solicitor whose firm went on to become Mills & Reeve. I recently enjoyed a house and garden tour given by the current owner, Ellen Francis, and recommend visiting on July 10 via the Invitation to View Scheme. See [historichouses.org/house/Quy-hall/visit](http://historichouses.org/house/Quy-hall/visit)

■ The National Garden Scheme is inviting garden owners to open their gates in 2027 to help celebrate its landmark centenary year. For information on how to get involved visit: [ngs.org.uk/get-involved/open-your-garden](http://ngs.org.uk/get-involved/open-your-garden)

Melanie runs gardening and design company Hazelwood Plantscapes. To find out more, email [melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk](mailto:melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk) or visit [hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk](http://hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk)