

Arduaine and West Coast Scotland®

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National Trust for Scotland Arduaine Garden, Arduaine, By Oban, Argyll, Scotland. PA34 4XQ.

INTRODUCTION

Arduaine Garden, an 8-ha coastal property in Argyll, was laid out in 1898 and continued in private ownership until 1992 when it was presented to the National Trust for Scotland. The maritime influence makes it possible to grow a wide range of plants, in particular those which appreciate a relatively mild climate and a moist atmosphere, and are adapted to cooler summers and lower light levels than are to be expected further south. The situation on the Atlantic coast necessitates the careful selection of shelter planting to protect the plant collection from severe gales and salt damage, and the often shallow soil sometimes makes for difficult planting conditions.

CLIMATE AND THE NORTH ATLANTIC CURRENT

The climate of the British Isles is moderated in general by the surrounding sea, and in particular by the proximity of the Atlantic Ocean, over which passes the prevailing westerly wind. South and west coasts reap the most benefit from the relatively warm waters of the North Atlantic Current, a northerly extension of the Gulf Stream, which gives the British Isles a moister atmosphere, milder winters, and cooler summers than our neighbours on the other side of the Atlantic at Davis Inlet in Labrador, on much the same latitude.

Arduaine Garden sits on the south-facing slope of a promontory projecting into Loch Melfort in the upper part of the Sound of Jura, some 32 km south of the small fishing port and tourist town of Oban. The coastal situation of the garden has three main consequences.

First, heavy frosts are rare and short-lived, although since 1971 temperatures have reportedly dropped on two nights to -12°C . Most winters will see a fall to -7 or -8°C for short periods, these temperatures having only a minor effect on the current plant collection. As an indication of this effect, a drop below -8°C will begin to cause damage to unprotected specimens of *Cordyline australis*. The siting of plants is all-important, so the determination of warm and cold spots is well worthwhile. As a basic example, minimum night temperatures on slopes under a deciduous tree canopy are generally around 3°C higher here than those on open ground at the bottom of the hill.

Second, the moist airstream from the Atlantic has the effect of increasing rainfall, though the average annual precipitation at Arduaine is a fairly modest 190 cm. Parts of the garden are on steep slopes, which certainly assist with both water and frost drainage, but the combination of low temperatures and high rainfall in winter can be damaging to many plants which could tolerate far lower temperatures given drier conditions. Damage to bromeliads such as *Puya chilensis* may possibly be due as much to water freezing in the crown as to the low temperature damaging the plant itself — keeping the rain off might be enough to bring plants through the winter.

Third, this same moist airstream can frequently become a westerly or south-westerly gale, and ameliorating the effects of the wind, either of its sheer strength or its capacity to carry salt into the garden, is probably the most important facet of the

management of the property. Coastal gardens deal with the problem in different ways by the choice of trees and shrubs in their windbreaks. Historically, Arduaine has tried many options as fragments extant today testify: *Abies alba*, *Cupressus macrocarpa*, *Pinus sylvestris*, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, *Tsuga heterophylla*, and *Picea sitchensis*, the much maligned Sitka spruce, which has proved to be the most successful and is the species used increasingly today. The shrub layer is proving more difficult: *Griselinia littoralis*, *Escallonia* species and hybrids, *Olearia traversii*, and other recommended plants may be successful in the second row, but on our exposed western flank are often seriously defoliated, *G. littoralis* having its growth cut back one winter by as much as 2.4 m, though never damaged by frost alone in the coldest parts of the garden. Overhead cover within the woodland garden is largely *Larix kaempferi*, allowing maximum light through in the winter months while reducing internal swirling winds during gales.

Although winters are generally not severe, summers are rarely hot and the lack of summer ripening reduces the ability of many plants to withstand the winter. A number of rhododendrons produce extension growth into December in some years and are likely to suffer frost damage in the cold period often experienced around New Year. Many plants from continental climates fail to thrive here as the soft tips are regularly cut back in winter, resulting in lost leaders and slow, bushy growth. This happens with trees such as *Carrierea calycina*, which needs a new leader tied in every spring.

THE PLANT COLLECTION

In spite of our moderate climate Arduaine is not an “exotic” landscape in the popular sense of the word but a broad-leaved, cool temperate garden where the range of tender plants is constantly being added to. Although the collection contains a number of “exotic” plants such as palms and tree ferns, they are placed so as not to stand out.

***Rhododendron*.** Arduaine has become known for the collection of species rhododendrons, currently approaching 400. Although the collection is a general one, a decision has been made to concentrate on five groups: Azaleastrum and Chionastrum sections, Boothia, Edgeworthia and Maddenia subsections. Maddenia is the best represented here with approximately 120 taxa, of which 95 are species or subspecies, many from a range of wild origins. Some of the more tender or rare rhododendrons in the collection are listed below.

***Rhododendron arboreum* Subsection.** Represented in the collection by many varieties and subspecies including *R. arboreum* subsp. *albotomentosum*, a small-leaved plant with deep red flowers. *Rhododendron arboreum* subsp. *nilagiricum* is a wonderful but tender species from the Nilgiri Hills in southern India, and there are several specimens in the collection of the very similar *R. arboreum* subsp. *zeylanicum* from Sri Lanka, including a huge old multi-stemmed character planted probably in the 1920s. A magnificent *R. barbatum* with 36 striking red stems is a wonderful sight after a shower of rain.

***Grandia* Subsection.** Represented particularly well by *R. sinogrande*, producing trusses of football-sized cream flowers in most years; many examples of *R. macabeanum*, and several examples of *R. protistum*, including one which first flowered here in 1936. New collections of this species from Vietnam are now in the garden.

Maddenia and Edgeworthia Subsections. Generally tender and provide much of the springtime perfume: *R. maddenii* subsp. *maddenii* flowers in May though *R. maddenii* subsp. *crassum* can be as late as August. *Rhododendron formosum*, *R. veitchianum* (Cubittii Group), and *R. megacalyx* are all wonderful, but *R. lindleyi* and *R. taggianum* can be breathtaking in full flower, almost indecently flamboyant and fragrant. A few hybrids stand out: 'Harry Tagg', 'Mi Amor', and 'Jane Hardy', for example.

Rhododendron edgeworthii (syn. *R. bullatum*) is a great favourite with garden visitors as the large, fragrant, saucer-shaped blooms and deeply bullate leaves are very striking. Its smaller relative, *R. pendulum*, is a quietly attractive plant, thriving on mossy rocks, and the yellow *R. valentinianum* is happy here on rotting tree stumps, a habitat which *R. megeratum* also enjoys.

South American Plants. Arduaine has many excellent specimens of trees and shrubs from southern South America, many considered tender, and this side of the collection is being expanded. Three members of the Proteaceae from Chile thrive in our climate. The Chilean firebush, *Embothrium coccineum*, grows here from several wild provenances; *Gevuina avellana*, so-called Chilean hazel, flowers and fruits with no protection; and *Lomatia ferruginea* enjoys the conditions, handsome in fern-like leaf and astonishing in the colour and detail of the red and yellow flowers.

Asteranthera ovata appreciates the shelter and moisture of the woodland and covers mossy rocks and stumps with abandon, bursting into startling cerise flower in spring. Orange-flowered *Mitraria coccinea*, a fellow member of the Gesneriaceae, once grew to 7.6 m on a moss-covered tree trunk until the colder winter of 1995, but is now climbing back strongly.

Philesia magellanica is a fine sight in flower in June as it suckers along the shady rock garden but would probably flower even more profusely in full light here as long as it was moist. *Berberidopsis corallina* is said by one authority to grow to 6 m on a sunny wall, but here this rather exuberant creature reaches 18 to 21 m into a lofty larch, flowering in the canopy. Large tree-like specimens of *Eucryphia glutinosa* come alive with white hypericum-like flowers in August and the dark green spires of the Chilean gymnosperm *Podocarpus salignus* contrast with the pale green of the Japanese larches.

In the more open Lower Garden the very striking scrambler *Tropaeolum speciosum* flourishes to the detriment of many less vigorous plants, shrubs and perennials alike.

Other Noteworthy Plants. Arduaine has a number of good specimens of *Thujaopsis dolabrata* var. *hondai*, from northern Japan, including the tallest in cultivation in the UK at around 21 m. The East Asian *Magnolia campbellii* and *M. obovata* are old specimens and *Griselinia littoralis* from New Zealand grows into giant 15 m shrubs which flood the garden with their progeny. One of a group of *Eucalyptus urnigera* is claimed to be the tallest in cultivation in the UK at more than 36.6 m, while the largest of several *Trochodendron aralioides* is a surprising 15 m, a wonderful multi-stemmed tree. Young specimens of three species of *Schefflera* are coming on strongly, huge digitate foliage more familiar indoors in the U.K. climate, and immature magnolia relatives such as species of *Manglietia* and *Michelia* are slowly establishing, apparently damaged more by cold winter winds than frost. Three species of *Dicksonia* survive outside and the spectacular Chilean fern *Lophosoria quadripinnata* grows to a surprising 3 m, the fronds showing a glaucous underside to the inquisitive visitor.

Among interesting perennials are the luxuriant *Myosotidium hortensia*, the Chatham Island forget-me-not; blue poppies such as *Meconopsis betonicifolia*, *M. grandis* and the hybrid 'Lingholm'; and many members of the Iridaceae such as *Dietes*, *Diplarrhena*, *Libertia*, *Orthrosanthus*, and *Watsonia*. The very distinctive *Arisaema* do well here, as do an increasing number of plants in the Convallariaceae, including *Disporum*, *Polygonatum*, *Smilacina*, *Tricyrtis*, and *Uvularia*.

PLANTING CONDITIONS

The windy conditions discourage the planting of large specimens, though the shallow soil in some places makes this physically impossible, while the severe infestation of honey fungus, *Armillaria* sp., precludes the direct transplanting of woody plants, which eventually fall victim to the fungus. Lifted rhododendrons are potted into very wide, shallow containers for a year or two before being surface planted, a method which has become the rule without cultivated beds, by simply placing the rootball on the soil and mounding up with the chosen medium. This seems to encourage establishment and may slow the invading *Armillaria*. Where rhododendrons are planted on mossy rocks or stumps, particular care has to be taken during dry periods as the lack of mains water or any distribution system makes watering practically impossible and establishment unlikely.

The Role of the Veitch Nursery of Exeter in 19th Century Plant Introductions[©]

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The story of the Veitch family of Exeter is more than the story of the British love of plants. It is about adventure, guts, and single-minded determination. John Veitch was born in Jedburgh, Scotland, in 1752 and at age 19 travelled to London to seek a career and his fortune. Veitch first worked at a nursery in London. However he was soon offered a job as land agent by the Baronet Sir Thomas Acland to look after his estate of 35,000 acres in Devon.

In 1808, in return for his labours, Veitch was rewarded with a lifetime lease on land at Budlake, a few miles east of Exeter, to start a nursery business selling trees and shrubs. The nursery flourished and by 1832, already in partnership with his son James, he moved to larger premises at Mount Radford, Exeter, thus starting the famous Exeter Nursery.

In the second half of the 19th century, the U.K. was a confident country, largely at peace with its Empire and dominant in industries such as iron, coal, and cotton. Much of the population had moved into cities which produced a need for agricultural produce, which in turn brought new improved techniques for growing crops. These techniques were also available to horticulture, everything from fertilisers, manures, and pesticides to lawnmowers and other labour-saving machines. The time was ripe for the nursery trade to exploit the world for plants to sell to a newly affluent population. Up until now plant introductions had been largely through scientific institutions such as botanic gardens together with a few wealthy patrons on large estates.