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A Week at Sissinghurst: Comparing Pruning Techniques Across the Pond

Editor's note: *In March, we heard from a member, Ann Perkowski, of "a little bit of serendipity that came about thanks to the Garden Conservancy."*

Ann is a master gardener in Westchester County, NY, and the owner of a specialized pruning business called [Lady Clippers](#). Following is her story from her adventure abroad.

Last fall [October 23, 2013], I attended Alexis Datta's talk about Sissinghurst, which was presented in New York City by the Garden Conservancy. She must have mentioned something about volunteers, because afterwards we chatted about whether Americans ever volunteer at this magnificent garden. Her reply was, well, not really, but why not? After several rounds of calls and emails, I was invited to spend a week in late February in the Sissinghurst cottage and my days gardening alongside their talented, artistic, very hard-working staff. They couldn't have been more hospitable to me, sharing their culture along with their tricks of the trade. I absolutely loved it. Your lecture was the catalyst for an amazing adventure. Thank you!

Two similarities struck me: The creators of this 20th-century garden (on the land of a 16th-century Manor House), a married couple who were amateur gardeners, reminded me of Mr. & Mrs. Suhr and Rocky Hills. Second, the whole idea of the National Trust of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland preserving such a beautiful and historic space is not unlike the task of the Garden Conservancy.

Views from the clock tower

On my third day the garden manager surprised me with an offer to go up the clock tower. I hadn't realized it was even accessible. It was a glorious afternoon and made for some great overhead shots.



View from Sissinghurst's Elizabethan clock tower: Cottage Garden, Rose Garden, and beyond



The White Garden



South Cottage and Cottage Garden



The Manor House, greenhouses, and beyond



The orchard

Pruning techniques

Having studied garden design, I know this is a one-of-a-kind English garden. My particular interest is in pruning, a key focus at Sissinghurst as was evident from Alexis's talk. Late winter was a perfect time to see the structure of different pruning techniques.



An elaborate espalier in a pocket park in the lovely nearby town of Goudhurst



A perfect formal hornbeam hedge pruned in August. Clock tower and pink camellia in the distance.



A common sight: a tree grown against a brick wall, a 2-D effect. They are espaliered for form as well as to take advantage of additional heat radiating from the wall, since summers in the UK are not as warm as ours in the US. Fruit does not always ripen.



Tricks of the trade: many wires hold climbing plants in place.



Another espalier. Barely seen are the series of wires to hold limbs in place.



Artistically tied fig



Coppiced hazel branches from the Nuttery are used to tie rose branches down. Climbing roses require the tension of being tied horizontally.



Close-up view of the elaborate rose tying



Boxwood "tables"



Lime Walk in spring (pollarded and grafted *Tilia*, aka linden trees)



Close-up of grafting



Perfect formal hedges



Close-ups of pollarded linden trees



Lime Walk beyond formal hornbeam hedge



The magnificent Yew Walk



A great combination: mondo grass and crocus

Visiting Sissinghurst

The gardens at Sissinghurst Castle are now open to visitors year-round, even during the quiet off-season. Ann Perkowski reports, "in late February, I was treated to seas of spring ephemerals, dozens of hellebores, camellias in full bloom, and, of course, a good look at the bones of a great English garden. They have a lovely shop and two cafes on the property. Plus, I discovered the charm of village pubs and of roaming the Kent countryside."

For information about visiting Sissinghurst, see the [National Trust's website](#).

[Return to front page >](#)



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The Garden Conservancy | Headquarters | P.O. Box 219, Cold Spring, NY 10516 | T: 845.424.6500 | F: 845.424.6501