The background of the cover is a photograph of a pond with several tall, thin plants in the foreground. The plants have dark green stems and large, vibrant red flowers. The water in the pond is dark and reflects the surrounding greenery. The overall mood is serene and natural.

the anglophile

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KEW GARDENS

The largest and most diverse botanical and mycological collections in the world, all in summer bloom now in West London

Cover Story

Kew Gardens

Kew Gardens was created with two very distinct purposes in mind.

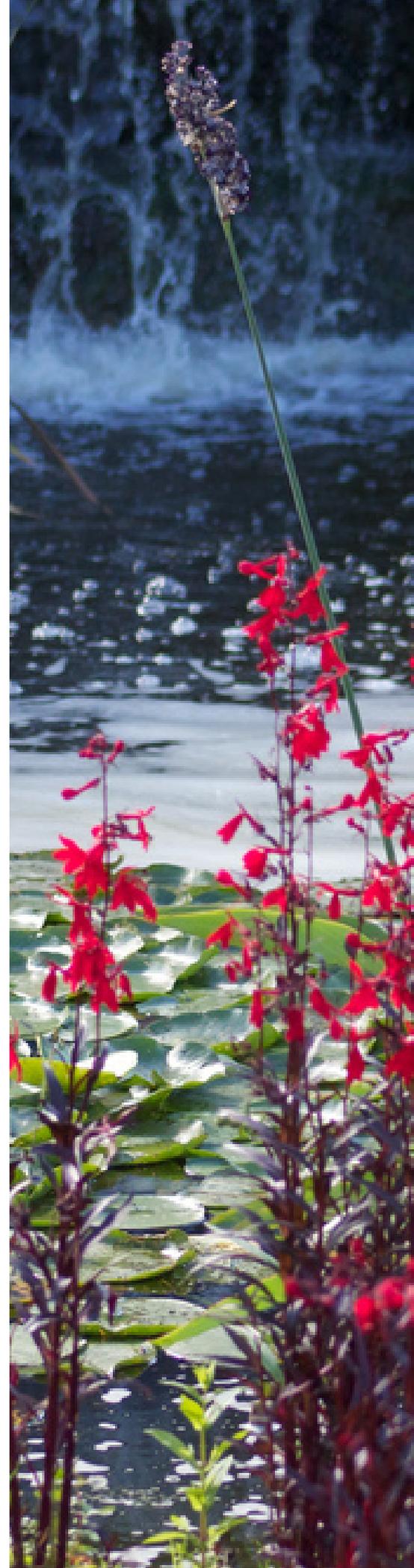
On the one hand, it was intended as a pleasure garden; a place where members of the Royal Family could stretch their legs, gaze at nature's beauty and flirt with people to whom they were not married, without ever having to share breathing space with the unwashed masses. On the other, Kew established itself in its earliest days as a leading botanical research centre and its talented scientists have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the natural world. Successfully negotiating this most difficult of balancing acts has made Kew Gardens one of London's true treasures.



ROYAL BEGINNINGS

Founded in 1759 by Princess Augusta, widow of Prince Frederick and the mother of the future King George III, Kew Gardens was installed around the royal summer residence of Kew Palace. At the time of Prince Frederick's death in 1751, Augusta was pregnant with her ninth child. She spent the subsequent two decades of her widowhood raising her brood of children in near-total seclusion and spent a great deal of time in the gardens at Kew.

In around 1769 Augusta recruited William Aiton from Chelsea Physic Garden to add a medicinal garden of exotic specimens to Kew and the gardens swelled to contain more than 3,400 species. It is thought that some of these early specimens were collected by Captain Cook during his many overseas voyages and gifted to the royal family.





STRIKING BUILDINGS

In 1760 architect William Chambers was recruited to create a number of buildings and follies in the gardens that would amuse the reclusive Princess Augusta and her supposed paramour, the Earl of Bute. The Turkish mosque, Moorish Alhambra, waxworks museum, observatory and House of Confucius built by Chambers have not survived to the present day – but one very striking building is still standing.

Precisely situated at the end of an avenue of trees, Chambers' incredible 163 foot Chinese pagoda provides a dramatic and entirely unexpected sight for visitors to a London garden. His design includes ten floors, a diversion from the religiously significant seven-floor design of authentic Chinese pagodas, which were intended to represent the seven steps to heaven.

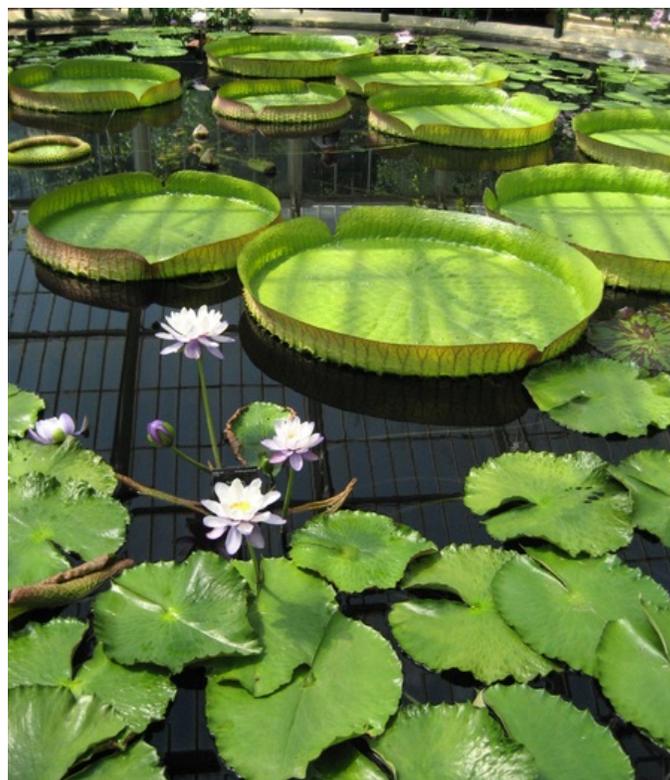
Other structures designed by Chambers still grace the gardens, including the Ruined Arch – a mock-up of a piece of destroyed Roman architecture – and a Classical Greek temple called the Temple of Aeolus.

Kew Gardens was given an extreme makeover in the 1840s when it was adopted as a national botanical garden and took on its first curator, John Smith. The gardens were expanded to take up 75 acres, the pleasure grounds increased to 270 acres and three of the gardens' most famous structures were built.

Between 1844 and 1848, architect Decimus Burton and iron-maker Richard Turner worked together to design the incredible curved glass and iron structure of the Palm House.

This features hand-blown panes of glass and was the first large-scale structure made from wrought iron anywhere in the world. Today the Palm House is considered to be the world's most important surviving Victorian glass and iron structure and contains tropical plant species that are endangered and even extinct in the wild.

Burton also designed Kew's Temperate House, the world's largest glasshouse that took over 40 years to build. The Temperate House is twice the size of the Palm House and home to 1,500 different species of rare and threatened temperate plants.





SCIENCE AT KEW

Queen Victoria became a patron of Kew Gardens and throughout her reign she supported the gardens' transformation into an internationally-significant research centre. The work of scientists at Kew Gardens was instrumental to the British Empire's attempts to transform newly-seized land into fertile, crop-producing territory.

Providing seeds, horticultural advice and skilled personnel to help colonising communities survive, Kew's scientists proved the importance of their work. All life on earth depends on the health of our plants, and that work is no less essential today as habitat and biodiversity conservation become a matter of life and death for us all.

Suffering from the economic effects of two world wars on London's economy, Kew Garden fell into decline during the early to mid-twentieth century but was reinvigorated in 1965 when it formed a partnership with Wakehurst Place in Sussex.

In the year 2000, the Millennium Seed Bank was established at Wakehurst. The seed bank's aim is to collect and conserve seeds from 25% of the world's wild flowering plant species by 2020. Although the seed bank and its partners have already made an incredible contribution to plant conservation, much more funding is needed for it to reach this goal. Also in the year 2000, Kew Gardens joined other botanic gardens across 190 countries to develop the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.

Today, scientists continue to toil away behind-the-scenes, peering into microscopes and swirling test-tubes in a valiant effort to sustain human life on earth. At the same time, visitors roam the gardens to see what new treasures they can find.

THE STORY CONTINUES

The Princess of Wales Conservatory was established in Kew Gardens in 1987 and contains a stunning cacti collection, a creepy insectivorous collection and a quaint underfoot waterway system that contains giant koi fish.

A Japanese Landscape Garden was created at Kew in 1996 to complement the Chokushi-mon, a ceremonial gateway built for the Japan-British Exhibition of 1910.

In 2006, the Davies Alpine House was officially opened to provide the perfect conditions for Kew's collection of Alpine Plants. And in 2008, an 18 metre high and 200 metre long treetop walkway was installed at Kew Gardens to allow visitors to walk through across the tree canopy of a woodland glade. These are just a few of the extraordinary features that attract around two million visitors to Kew Gardens every year.

In 2003, Kew Gardens was given the well-earned designation of a UNESCO world-heritage site and in recent years has expanded its program of arts and family-friendly events, making it the envy of more formal historic London sites. As a public institution Kew knows that in order to survive it must adapt to the conditions of a rapidly changing world – much like the plants, trees and wildlife it so expertly cares for.