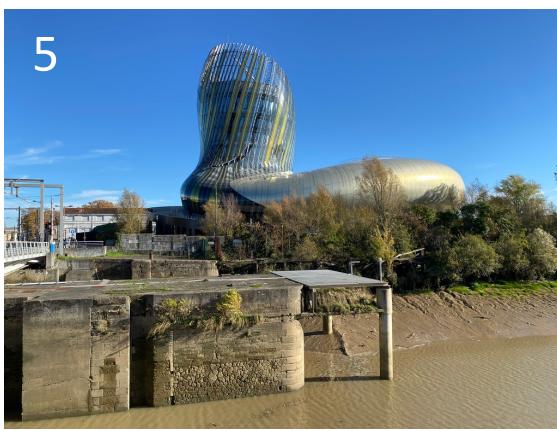


# Botanic Gardens

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## Jardin Botanique de Bordeaux

A recent visit to Bordeaux has convinced me that riverside parks are the way to go. An afternoon stroll through the Parc des Berges de Queyries (1), ending with a visit to the Jardin Botanique (2), provides a lush estuarine contrast to the severe stone quays of Chartrons on the opposite bank of the Garonne, source of the city's wealth (3). Bordeaux is the 9th largest city in France. It has many English connections, both historical and industrial, reflected today in its viticultural heritage (4). The rich history of Bordeaux wine is compared and contrasted with that of other international wines in the eye-catching Cité du Vin museum (5).



Bordeaux has two Botanical Gardens: the original one, in the city centre on the Left bank of the Garonne, called the Parc à l'Anglaise or Jardin Public, of about an acre, and a modern, science-focused garden on the Right bank, covering 10 acres, known as the Jardin Botanique de la Bastide.

The Left bank garden was created in 1629 as Le Jardin des Plantes. Today's garden dates from 1858, and features over 3,000 plant species, an extensive seed collection and herbarium of 85,000 specimens. The Right bank gardens were opened in 2003 and built according to designs by landscape gardener Catherine Mosbach and architect Francoise-Helene Jourda.



The Bastide gardens, under the discerning gaze of Linnaeus (6), are divided into several 'project' areas. There is an eco-friendly greenhouse, with timber supports built of Douglas Fir resembling tree trunks (7), sourced from Norway, and containing plants needing a Mediterranean climate (8,9). Other parts of the building house rotating exhibitions (currently focusing on carnivorous plants) as well as a permanent exhibition on the history of plant classification.

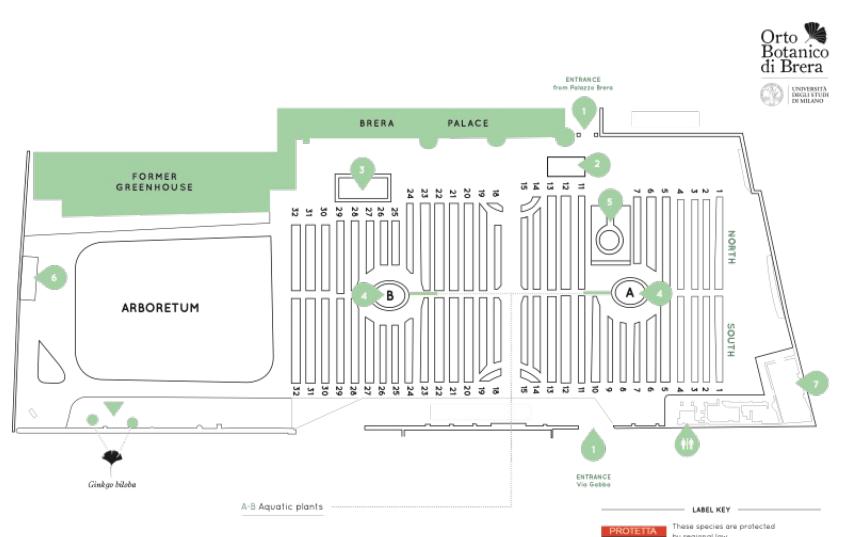
Outside, accompanying a bas-relief by Fernand Léger (10), are 11 huge natural landscapes, representing terrains typical of the regions in Aquitaine around Bordeaux (11). A path through this area leads to an immense water garden containing water lilies and other aquatic plants (12-14). Magnifique!



## L'Orto Botanico di Brera, our partner in Milan

In the bustling city centre of Milan, there is a silent green oasis – the Botanical Garden of the Palazzo di Brera (1). The gardens of the Brera have been reserved for meditation and contemplation since the 13th century, first by the Humiliati (a religious order centred in Northern Italy) and then by the Jesuits, who established a college for the education of the clergy and nobility in the Palazzo in the 1570s. As well as teaching mathematical sciences such as astronomy and physics, the Jesuits cultivated medicinal herbs in the gardens to support their pharmacy. Following the suppression of The Society of Jesus by Pope Clement XIV in 1773, the Brera became a cultural centre of excellence, akin to a University, teaching both pharmacy and systematic botany based on Linnean principles. A new Botanic Garden was created, and its first Director, Fulgenzio Vitman, was appointed in 1774.

The Orto Botanico has retained many of the features of its 18<sup>th</sup> century forbear, with systematic beds (2) carefully maintained by a team of resident gardeners (3), and an arboretum harbouring two enormous Gingko trees. The first 'northern' bed houses the garden's hellebore collection (see plan), their *Helleborus foetidus* (4) showing a similar precocity to ours!



Milan is close to the Italian Alps and can be extremely cold, accounting for the late arrival of many spring plants in the Orto. Two early-flowering varieties were already evident, however, both recognizable due to their delicate scents: the witch hazel *Hamamelis x intermedia* (Rehder) 'Jelena' (5,6), and the winter calicanthus, *Chimonanthus praecox* (7) which towered, tree-like, overhead. Although yet to emerge, another prominent feature within the garden is their collection of paeonies – certainly worth another visit in the not-too-distant future!

As befits a University department, the Brera Botanic Garden has a strong educational mission, regularly holding tours and classes on site. We hope to establish a partnership with them, to support the St Clement's programme with our local school, Park Street Primary.



## Orto Botanico di Brera 2

A visit to Milan in January, the subject of an earlier report, has been followed by an expedition to observe the arrival of Spring. As always, the gardening team at the Brera botanical garden have been hard at work (1,2) – La Primavera is a great time to root out all those unwanted seedlings which have self-propagated amongst the systematic beds. Born of many years experience, their highly organised approach is ideal for maintaining order in what could easily become an unmanageable chaos. Perhaps we should establish a similar regime at St Clement's!



Amongst the highlights of our winter visit were the Hellebores, which are now in their prime (3-6). Cultivars such as 'Apricot Blush' and 'Pink Lady' (4) are coming to fruition, joining the rampant Corsican *H. argutifolius* (3,5). The rather arresting 'Blue Lady' (6) has joined them, together with the attractive Mediterranean spurge, *Euphorbia characias* (7).



Upon entering the garden, one immediately becomes aware of a delightful fragrance in the air, originating from the profusion of blooms on *Daphne odora* (8,9). A favourite in the English scented garden, *D. odora* is actually native to China. In Korea, the plant is called "chullihyang" – a thousand-mile scent – which seems quite appropriate!

The Brera Garden has an excellent collection of ferns (Pteridophytes, 10-13), some of which maybe we should explore introducing into St Clement's. The ferns are a group of around 12,000 species that evolved on dry land 400 million years ago. They can either be epiphytes growing on rocks or trees, or terrestrials rooting in the soil. Most are less than a metre in height, although tree ferns such as *Dicksonia antarctica* (13) can become many metres tall. Reproduction relies not on seeds but on spores, which are found on the underside of the fronds.



Floral motifs occur in many of the paintings in the adjacent Brera Institute. In medieval times, gardens such as the predecessors of the Orto Botanico may have inspired artists such as Pesaro (14,15). Is that a dandelion I see in the flowery meadow behind the Pesaro Madonna of 1390?



Nestling in the hills of the Dordogne, between Souillac and Sarlat, is a magical landscape – Les Jardins de Cadiot (1). From open meadows (2) to woodland glades (3), the gardens capture the essence of the Dordogne countryside. The tranquillity is broken only by the calls of woodpeckers and the humming of insects.

An inspiring mix of the formal and the natural, the Gardens of Cadiot are the brainchild of Anne-Marie and Bernard Decottignies: Bernard, an architect, and Anne-Marie, a botanist, have devoted the last 40 years to moulding this landscape into a series of not one, but 10 gardens, each with its own character and focus (shown on the poster, 1).



The Decottignies have evolved a sustainable “permaculture” in which novel biodiversity has been integrated into the garden by judicious experimentation over 40 years. Their aim has been to create natural equilibria within the ecosystems, with each space adapted to its natural inhabitants and surrounding terrain.

Medicinal plants and vegetables greet you upon arrival (4,5), propagated by an organic, locally-sourced hay mulching system. The garden also includes more formal plantings, with a mix of field roses (6) and more eye-catching plants such as Martagon lilies (7) growing alongside alliums at the edge of the meadow area.



The success of this integration of Nature and Design is indicated by the enormous diversity of plants and insects which the gardens now support. Some of the fascinating insects which we found in the garden included the Round-necked Longhorn beetle (*Stenopterus rufus*, 8); the pollen-consuming White-spotted Rose beetle (*Oxythyrea funesta*, 9); the somewhat worryingly named Bee-eating beetle (*Trichodes apiaries*, 10); the Black-and-Red Froghopper (*Cercopis vulnerata*, 11); and the Thick-legged Flower beetle (*Oedemera nobilis*, 12). The plants in the Tuscan Garden (13) included Lacy Phacelia and Opium Poppies, magnets for insect life, attracting vast numbers of beetles, honeybees and hoverflies.

We could create a similar permaculture to that at Cadot in the churchyard...

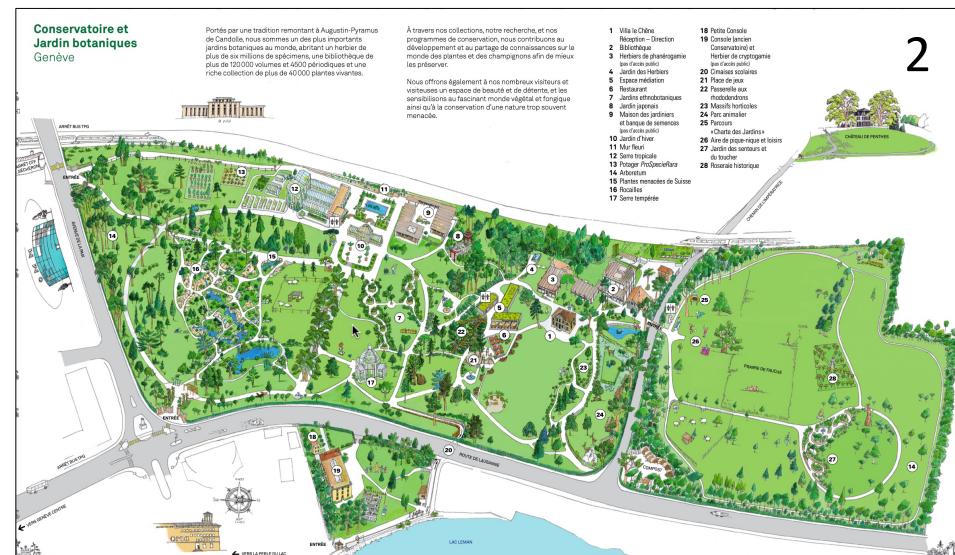
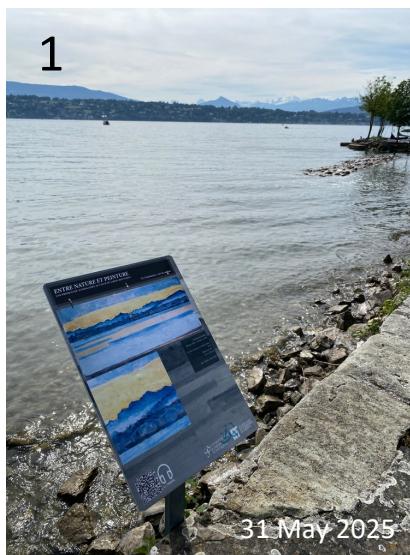


# On the Shores of Lake Geneva

This time of the year is excellent for visiting gardens. And some of the best are, of course, botanic gardens, where trained botanists have organised, identified and carefully labelled the plants for you. Two botanical gardens that I have had the pleasure of visiting recently are those in Geneva in Switzerland and Lyon in France. Today we are in Geneva; later we will visit Lyon.

The Conservatoire et Jardins botaniques (CJBG) in Geneva occupy an idyllic situation on the edge of Lake Geneva (1), providing a perfect environment for establishing and maintaining new plants. Although a place of beauty and relaxation, in reality they house an infrastructure that supports all that modern science, from automated DNA sequencing to satellite mapping of distant rain forests, can offer.

Initially sited in the heart of Geneva, in a cramped corner at the foot of the ramparts of the Old Town, they were the brainchild of the Geneva botanist Augustin Pyramus de Candolle (1778-1841) who began the garden in 1817. Soon outgrowing its original location, the garden moved to its present site on the outskirts of Geneva in 1904 and now extends to 28 hectares (2).



Candolle (3), a student of the Genevan Protestant pastor Jean Pierre Étienne Vaucher, acquired a wide experience of botany, through studies first in Paris and later in Montpellier. He returned to Geneva in 1817, where he was tasked with establishing a new botanic garden in the city centre. Candolle was fascinated by botanical taxonomy – indeed he coined the word ‘taxonomy’. But above all he recognised the importance of herbaria (physical collections of preserved specimens) for research, establishing a monumental collection referred to as the *Prodromus systematis naturalis regni vegetabilis*, extending to 17 authoritative books and containing 150,000 specimens. This work continues today (5).



The Conservatoire et Jardins botaniques in Geneva illustrate how botanic gardens so wonderfully capture distant horizons, as here for the mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*, 6,7), a beautiful North American plant. Their preservation requires constant vigilance!

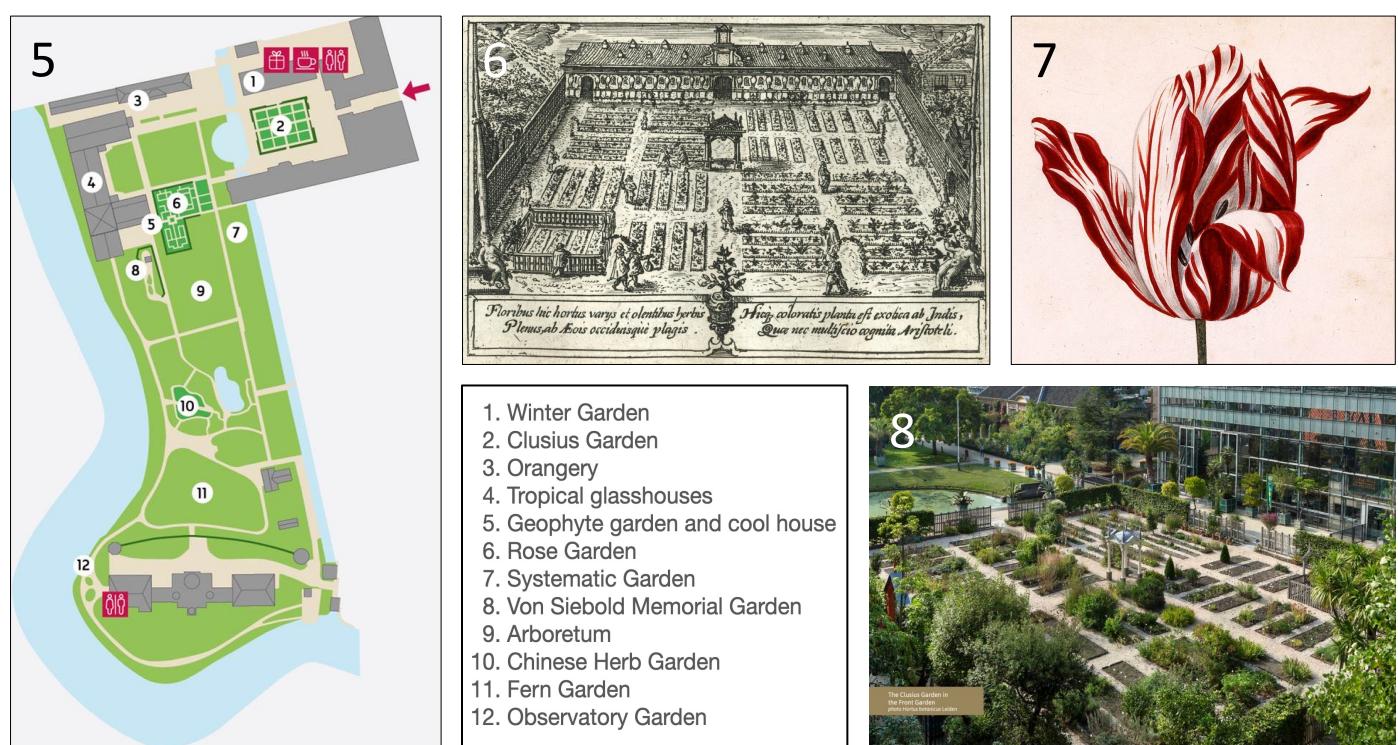


# The Hortus Botanicus in Leiden

The Dutch are scholars of the Classics. Befittingly, their botanic gardens are called 'horti botanici'. The first in a long line of Dutch botanic gardens was the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden. The garden was founded in 1590, some years after the first European botanic gardens were established in Italy (in Pisa, 1544, and Padua, 1545). Northern Europeans were relatively late in recognizing the importance of botanic gardens for studying the medicinal properties of plants, with the French establishing Montpellier in 1593, and the English following suit with the first botanic garden at Oxford in 1621. Ank Rijelsford and I visited the Hortus in Leiden this week (1).



The prime mover in the establishment of the Hortus in Leiden was a Frenchman from Arras, Charles de l'Ecluse, known to his friends as Carolus Clusius (2). Clusius came to Leiden fresh from success in establishing a medicinal garden for the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian II, in Vienna. He was a great asset to Leiden, since he had already built an impressive network of collaborators across Europe in the service of the Emperor. Although the first Hortus was very small (see 2 in the plan of the garden in Figure 5), Clusius crammed over 1000 species into it, derived from his contacts all over the world. Progress was greatly accelerated by interactions with the Dutch East India Company, with whom Clusius negotiated the provision of plants and seeds from the Dutch colonies in India and South Asia, thereby augmenting Leiden's collection of tropical plants, which is still one of the Hortus' strengths. By 1610, the Hortus was recognized as one of the leading botanic gardens in Europe (6).



Amongst the plants that came to Leiden was the tulip. Recently imported from Turkey, the international success of tulip breeding in Leiden lay the foundations of the Dutch bulb industry. At the height of Tulipomania, single bulbs of the most prized tulips, such as 'Semper Augustus' shown in Figure 7, were fetching the price of the average house! Meanwhile, in the laboratory, it was Clusius and his team that traced the extreme variation in patterning of tulip flowers to their infection by what he termed 'the tulip breaking virus', marking the arrival of a more scientific approach to botany.

The Hortus in Leiden is a magnificent botanic garden, and there is much to see, including a fine collection of orchids (9,10) - as well as many eye-catching specimens such as the *Hibiscus trionum* (11,12). Well worth a visit!

