

National Trust heritage gardens benefit from major new plant conservation centre

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Rare plants from National Trust gardens across the country will be propagated at a new Plant Conservation Centre that will improve the way one of the most important plant collections in the UK is cared for.

Opened by international plantsman Roy Lancaster, the new 2.5 acre facility at a secret East Devon location will bring together plant propagation facilities, plant collection management expertise and facilities for training National Trust (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>) staff on all aspects of caring for the important plants in the gardens they look after.

The opening of the new facilities comes at a time when the spread of new plant diseases in the UK, in particular 'Phytophthora ramorum' which causes Sudden Oak Death, have required an acceleration of emergency propagation to ensure the survival of threatened specimens and the supply of disease-free replacements.

The £700,000 Centre's immediate focus will be to build on existing plant conservation work at Knightshayes Court, also in Devon, to help staff and volunteers record and identify the special plants that require priority propagation at National Trust gardens throughout the country.

Mike Calnan, Head of Gardens at the National Trust, said: "The National Trust's portfolio of plants is of immense importance and is one of the most significant collections in the UK.

"The aesthetic, historic and botanical value of the plants is what makes the gardens we look after so special and give pleasure to more than 12 million visitors each year.

"This is the most important plant conservation initiative from the National Trust for more than 60 years and will have a legacy for decades to come."

The charity cares for over 20 major collections of trees and shrubs including thirty National Plant Collections and hundreds of plants that were first raised or collected in the wild around the globe and planted in National Trust gardens over past centuries.

Roy Lancaster said: "The new Plant Conservation Centre is a hugely important development for the National Trust, creating for the first time a single facility dedicated to the vital work of conserving the important plants in its properties."

In addition to the Centre's work for the National Trust, a new bespoke propagation service for major private plant collection owners will be offered for the first time.

Propagation services are also available to Trust countryside properties wishing to save or bulk-up rare native species.

The National Trust gardeners who will be working at the Centre recently propagated and helped save over

300 old Cornish apple varieties now successfully established in the 'Mother orchard' at Cotehele in Cornwall.

Charlie Port, who worked for the National Trust at Knightshayes and is now one of the volunteers that will be working at the new Centre, said: "Working in the propagation unit is extremely rewarding.

"I've been involved with propagating plants for the Trust for 25 years now and during that time we've had thousands of successes.

"I get huge satisfaction from the idea that some of the plants I have handled will be around for hundreds of years to come."

About The National Trust:

With more than 250,000 hectares of countryside and 710 miles of coastline across England, Wales and Northern Ireland there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy days out with the National Trust. The charity is one of the most important countryside conservation organisations in Europe. It promotes environmentally friendly practises and carries out conservation work (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/what-we-do/what-we-protect/>) on the diverse and rare wildlife that lives on its land. It also looks after for more than 300 houses and gardens, from workers cottages to stately homes, preserving not only buildings but the stories of the people who lived there. The National Trust also offers a range of holidays and gardens to visit (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/places/gardens-and-parks/>). These spaces inspire the Trust's 4 million members, 61,000 volunteers and 5 million other visitors every year.

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