of the world’s most romantic gardens to visit
chosen by Anna Pavord

1 Endsleigh
Humphry Repton, the great 19th-century landscaper, worked at Endsleigh and in the valley to the west of the house you catch the essence of his genius. Water charges under paths, tips down rock faces and meanders obediently along leafy walks. Of all picturesque subjects there is none so interesting as Water in rapid motion; he writes. Endsleigh has a quality that is increasingly difficult to find in a garden: romance and a strong spirit of place. In 2014 the garden opens for the first time for the National Gardens Scheme. Address Hotel Endsleigh, Milton Abbott, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0PQ. Tel 01822 870000 Website hotelendsleigh.com

2 Dundonnell
When you cross the stone bridge over the river to Dundonnell in Scotland, you arrive in a different world. First are the trees – huge limes, beech and sweet chestnuts, as well as sycamore and ash. Then the house, superbly strong, white-harled, standing in a meadow of long grass. Then the walled garden, three acres of inspired beauty arranged around a monumental yew, thought to be at least 2,000 years old. Thrilling. Astonishing. Open for charity (see scotlandsgardens.org). Address Dundonnell House, Dundonnell, Little Loch Broom, Wester Ross IV23 2QW. Tel 07789 390028

3 Bolfracks
Bolfracks tells you immediately that it is a much-loved garden, beautifully looked after and impervious, quite rightly, to fashion. It has a quiet peace and self-confidence, the planting still singing of the 1950s: cherries, acers, berberis, good species rhododendrons. The twig house makes a romantic hideaway. Address Bolfracks, Aberfeldy, Perthshire PH15 2EX. Tel 01887 820344 Website bolfracks.com

4 Gresgarth
“I’m getting more Italian as I get older,” says designer Arabella Lennox-Boyd about her own garden at Gresgarth where a geometric arrangement of steps and terraces leads down to meet the lake on the southwest front of the house. The design may be formal but the planting is rich, lush and passionate. Address Gresgarth Hall, Caton, Lancashire LA2 9AB. Tel 01524 771838 Website arabellalennoxboyd.com

5 La Foce
For more than a decade in the first half of the 20th century, the brilliant architect-designer Cecil Pinsent worked with Iris Origo on her garden at La Foce in Italy’s Val d’Orcia. Were they in love? “He was. And I was,” said Iris Origo. “But not at the same time.” Around the villa, a series of intimate gardens are enclosed by yew hedges and walls of gorgeous travertine stone. At a higher level, a pergola swathed in wisteria gives staggering views out over the vale. Address La Foce, Strada della Victoria 62, S3042 Chianciano Terme, Siena, Italy. Tel +39 057 869 103 Website lafoce.com
6 Villa Lante

The garden at Villa Lante in Italy is said by connoisseurs to mark the beginning of the story of the pleasure garden in Europe. Made by Cardinal Gambara for love of himself, rather than another, the design hangs on a dramatic central vista stretching over fountains and pools, shady benches and stairways to a delicious grotto (just made for proposals) at the far end of the garden. Address Villa Lante, Via Jacopo Barozzi 71, 01031 Bagnaia (VT), Italy. Tel +39 0761 288008

7 Marqueyssac

Marqueyssac overlooks the Dordogne, one of a clutch of battlemented châteaux that glare at each other from their respective peaks. The garden was created by Julien de Cervel, who adored Italy and made this place as close to his Italian dream as he could manage. The result, more than 150 years on, is spectacular: molten box topiary under tall cypresses and umbrella pines. Address Les Jardins Suspendus de Marqueyssac, 24220 Vezac, Dordogne, France. Tel +33 5 53 31 36 36 Website marqueyssac.com

8 Misarden Park

When I let myself into the garden at Misarden, it was so still, so enclosed in its own bubble of tranquillity, I thought I might have tripped into a golden afternoon of the Edwardian era. Generous herbaceous borders run down either side of a central lawn; echinops, plume poppy, inula, stately spires of delphinium. A pergola of roses and a wide yew hedge shield a kitchen garden. Timeless. Gorgeous. Address Misarden Park, Miserden, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL6 7JA. Tel 01285 821303 Website misardenpark.co.uk

9 Plas Brondanw

Architect Clough Williams-Ellis lived at Plas Brondanw in Wales for more than 70 years, gradually surrounding himself with architectural topiary and allées of box and yew, curling flights of steps, fountains, and the best vista in Britain, ending in the peaks of Snowdonia. For him, the place became a passion “an obsession if you like,” and romance still lingers in this wonderful place. Address Plas Brondanw, Llanrhaeadr, Pennafanynenau, Gwynedd LL48 6SW. Tel 01766 772772 Website brondanw.org

10 Lotusland

To British eyes, the extraordinary garden at Lotusland in Santa Barbara, California, is like a giant film set for the Disney film Fantasia with weird but wonderful cacti, superb succulents, rare cycads, flowering aloes and a forest of dragon trees. The only thing more extraordinary than the garden itself, with its Moorish rills and lotus pools, is its creator, the self-styled Madame Ganna Walska (1887–1984), who spent the fortunes of six husbands making this place. Not to be missed. Address Directions to garden given when booking a visit. Ganna Walska Lotusland Foundation (offices only) is at 695 Ashley Road, Santa Barbara, California 93108, USA. Tel +1 805 969 9990 Website lotusland.org