Chanticleer FAQs

Chanticleer is a 35-acre pleasure garden located in Wayne, a suburb along Philadelphia's Main Line 30-miles west of Philadelphia. It is open to the public from April through early November, from Wednesday through Sunday each week.

Many questions about the garden are answered on our website, chanticleergarden.org, or in the books *The Art of Gardening; Chanticleer*, *A Pleasure Garden*; and *Now and Then*. Some of the most frequently asked questions are answered below.

Q: How did Chanticleer come to be?
A: The garden evolved from the seven acres of land acquired in 1912 by Adolph Rosengarten Sr., head of the Philadelphia pharmaceutical company Rosengarten and Sons (which eventually merged with Merck & Co.). He built a large house for his family, which included children Adolph Jr. and Emily. Over the years, the acreage was expanded by Adolph Rosengarten Jr. and his wife Janet, who loved the rolling hills and pleasant open spaces around their home. Rosengarten Jr., lamenting the development that was changing this landscape in the late 20th Century, saved the land he loved by giving it away to be enjoyed as a public garden.

Q: How did it get its name?
A: The Rosengartens named their home after "Chanticlere" in Thackeray's 1855 novel *The Newcomes*. The fictional Chanticlere was "mortgaged to the very castle windows" but "still the show of the county." The Rosengartens played on the word, synonymous with "rooster," using rooster motifs throughout the property.

Q: How is the garden managed?
A: The garden is governed by a nine-member board that includes several members of the extended Rosengarten family. Operational responsibility rests with the Executive Director. Money to run the garden is from the endowment left by Adolph Rosengarten Jr. and from money raised on site by our guests.

Q: Why is Chanticleer so often described as "a pleasure garden"? Aren't all gardens meant to be pleasurable?
A: The garden aims to be a total delight, or pleasure, says Executive Director R. William Thomas, an escape from the hassles of everyday life. "Chanticleer allows one to be immersed by beauty… I hope everyone finds that to be a pleasure," he says. "If every garden is a pleasure garden, what a wonderful world this is."

Q: Is the ruin garden the remains of an estate house?
A: No. The ruin was built to capture the feeling of a building that has been abandoned, and is reminiscent of landscaping popular during the Picturesque Movement in the 18th

Chanticleer FAQs

Century. But Chanticleer's ruin is built on the site of "Minder," the former home of Adolph Rosengarten Jr., and incorporates some of the materials from that house.

Q: Are picnics and pets allowed in the gardens?
A: We welcome guests to picnic in the garden's four designated picnic areas. On Friday evenings from May through the Labor Day weekend, Chanticleer stays open until 8 p.m., and visitors may bring picnics to enjoy anywhere in the garden from 5 to 8 p.m. As for trash, it's carry in and carry out – there are no trash bins. But guests should leave Fido – and those after-dinner cigarettes – at home. Pets are not allowed in the garden, which is also a smoke-free zone.

Q: How about young children who come with their parents? Is there anything to entertain children at Chanticleer?
A: There certainly is. Discovering the "spitting toad" at one of the ponds is great fun for kids, as is finding all the roosters on the grounds. And there are those great hills to roll down – with parents' permission, of course.

Q: How many gardeners does it take to keep the gardens looking like this?
A: The Chanticleer staff includes seven horticulturists, who are responsible for designing and maintaining particular sections of the garden. There are approximately seven assistant horticulturists, and two groundskeepers. During the busy months, there are over forty people who work in the garden and on our visitor services team, as well as five interns.

Q: What do the gardeners do in winter?
A: Look around the garden and you will see. Most of the horticulturists are artists in other areas as well, and many spend the off season working on sculptural benches and chairs for the garden, designing beautiful bridges such as those that span Bell's Run creek, creating artistic wrought-iron fences for special areas of the garden, or building trellises and supports for the vegetable and cut-flower gardens. And, of course, they have to keep up to date with what is happening in horticulture, in addition to preparing and planting the garden for the spring opening.

Q: How many plants are in the gardens at Chanticleer?
A: There are over 10,000 plant accessions, representing over 5,700 taxa (different types of plants). But the total number of plants is much greater, since an accession may include multiple plants.

Q: There are no identification tags on most plants. How do visitors know what they are?
A: Plant lists for the major garden areas are available in handmade Plant List Boxes scattered throughout the garden and are also on the website.

Chanticleer FAQs

Q: Do the gardeners propagate plants for use in the gardens? If not, where does Chanticleer get its plants, some of which are very unusual?
A: The majority of plants are acquired from nurseries, many of which specialize in unusual plants, and from other gardens. Some plants are grown from seeds and cuttings in a small greenhouse on site.

Q: How do the horticulturists cope with insect pests in the gardens?
A: Chanticleer practices Integrated Pest Management, which advocates a natural balance as much as possible. Gardeners plant pest-resistant plants, practice cultural techniques aimed at producing healthy plants, and, when pesticides are used, try to use the least toxic possible.

Q: Does Chanticleer host weddings or private events?
A: No, Chanticleer does not host weddings or private events. We suggest that you explore other public gardens within 30 miles of Philadelphia, many of which have event rental spaces. Other gardens can be found through America's Garden Capital.

Q: How about wedding photographs?
A: No, wedding, family, engagement, and portrait photography is not permitted in the garden. Visitors are welcome to take snapshots of the garden for their personal pleasure, however, and avid amateur photographers are welcome to photograph the garden for non-commercial purposes when they sign the "Photography Guidelines and Tripod Use" form available online or at the entrance desk.

Q: Are painters allowed to set up their easels?
A: Yes, painters are welcomed on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. We hope artists of all kinds to be inspired by the garden. Chanticleer has sponsored workshops for young writers from a variety of backgrounds, and hosts classes taught by the Philadelphia Society of Botanical Artists, classes and tours offered through the Wayne Art Center, and numerous classes in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

Q: Is there a gift shop at Chanticleer?
A: There is no gift shop, but there are a few items available for purchase at the entrance desk. These include the books *The Art of Gardening, Chanticleer: A Pleasure Garden,* and *Now and Then*. Postcards, notecards, magnets and water bottles are also available.

Chanticleer is located at 786 Church Road, Wayne, PA 19087
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Opinion - Gardens, Financial Times

Chanticleer Garden gives an appetite for colchicums

A display like that in Philadelphia is a feast for the eyes — and for squirrels too

Robin Lane Fox

Chanticleer Garden, Philadelphia

Robin Lane Fox November 16, 2018

Two years ago I finally imitated another garden's good idea. In the admirable garden at Chanticleer in Philadelphia, I had seen an expanse of grass planted with groups of autumn-flowering colchicums, those bulbs whose flowers look like giant crocuses. The groups were well spread out and the effect was charming. Clusters of deep lilac flowers led the eye across lightly mown grass. The idea was adaptable to smaller spaces and was a reminder that well-spaced clumps of naturalised bulbs can be more effective than a solid carpet.

I adapted the idea when I copied it. I prefer white-flowered colchicums, so I bought 30 Colchicum speciosum Album and planted them that July. The general view is that colchicums are poisonous to wildlife, another plus point in my reckoning. Under my lawn's turf, they would be scampered on by squirrels, stamped on by badgers and skated over by foxes, but left alone. According to my bulb books, Squirrel Nutkin knows better than to eat them.

Within hours the books were proved wrong. Even as I was planting five colchicums on a lower stretch of lawn, two grey squirrels descended from the chestnut trees and scuffled out the colchicums in the upper lawn behind me. They played squirrel-football with the fragments, bitten by their teeth. A day later, 26 of the

30 bulbs had been gouged out of the ground and chewed to bits. There was not a sign of a squirrel with stomach ache. Only three bulbs survived and flowered. This spring I added another, bought in green leaf in the hope that its leaves would be poisonous. In September, this bulb and two others began to flower, whereupon a night-time digger hollowed a pit around each, bit off the stems and chewed each bulb in half.

Colchicum The Giant © Garden World Images Ltd/Alamy

Mortified, I have gone back to check the idea at source. Chanticleer Garden, near Wayne, is one of the joys of modern gardening. Its plantings are inventive, its team devoted and its style not hidebound by English fashion. The garden derives from the vision and commitment of two generations of Rosengartens, 19th-century German immigrants. The family began a chemical business and sold it to Merck in 1927. In 1912, Adolph Rosengarten senior had already bought seven acres with chestnut trees and commissioned a country house on the land. Wittily, he called it Chanticleer after the house in Thackeray's novel *The Newcomes* which was "mortgaged to the very castle windows [but] still the show of the county".

Under his son, Adolph junior, Chanticleer's gardens gained style and scope. He married Janet, also a dedicated gardener, and in the 1940s was enlisted to work at Bletchley Park in England, seat of wartime decoding. He saw English gardens and on his return laboured in his own. "To create a garden", he wrote, "is to search for a better world. Every gardener is like Oscar Hammerstein's Optimist, for the very act of planting is based on hope for a glorious future." Perhaps he never planted bulbs and watched them become instant squirrel-munch.

In 1976, he formed the Chanticleer Foundation to run it for the public and "educate amateur and professional gardeners". After his death, the garden's first executive director was English: Christopher

Woods' boldness enhanced and varied the garden's plan and planting. It has since been run by Bill Thomas, who describes himself as a "benevolent dictator", trained in part at nearby Longwood Gardens. There is a clear division of responsibilities. The foundation's trustees attend to the endowment, whose income, now $3.8m, maintains the gardens for some 40,000 paying visitors a year. In consultation with the gardeners, Thomas oversees the colour planning and planting. Like Adolph junior's, his daily walks around the garden are accompanied by a corgi. As a result, the garden has not become institutional or boringly maintained. In early June or the second week in September, especially, keen FT readers would learn and love a lot in it. It sets out to be a "gardeners' garden".

Philadelphia Squirrel has meadow-manners which our rat-like greys should be sent abroad to learn

On my second visit, without a corgi, I had two problems in mind. One was the proliferation of small-flowered blue asters in my borders, running wild after several years. The other was the colchicum crisis. Heading straight for the colchicum meadow, I thought it even more charming. From the nearby trees, dark-coloured American squirrels hopped across to give me a bushy-tailed welcome among the lilac flowers. They took no interest in the bulbs. In 2011, the Chanticleer gardeners issued *The Art of Gardening*, a handsome book about their skills and plantings, published by Timber Press. I much recommend it, as it is full of acute advice on everything from the pruning of hydrangeas to little-known trees with pretty bark. "Neither deer nor rodents eat the poisonous long-lived colchicums", it states, "which become more impressive each year." The deer are kept out by high wire fences all around the garden. As for Philadelphia Squirrel, she has meadow-manners which our rat-like greys should be sent abroad to learn.

Dan Benarcik has been a master-gardener at Chanticleer since 1993. It was he who introduced a tropical style of planting in the Teacup Garden, backing on to one of the houses. From there it has become a trendy fashion for designers in Britain, including Great Dixter in Sussex where it spurred on the late Christopher Lloyd. Over coffee, Benarcik pondered my colchicum problem. The white ones, he observed, were a bad choice. They are less vigorous and do not spread. At Chanticleer, Colchicum Lilac Wonder and The Giant are the meadow's mainstays. As for the wildlife, Benarcik recommends fixing fine-mesh wire netting on to the grass, pinned flat so that mowing will still be possible. The flowers will poke through in September, the leaves should follow in spring and paws should be kept out.

I went outside to enjoy the last of the season's annuals and the first autumn colour. In several plantings, single-flowered blue asters were at their best, the longest-lasting varieties being October Sky and Raydon's Favourite, both little known in Britain. They are thinned, but not thrown out. I felt better about my own blue-flowered invaders and decided to dot them in difficult places and learn to love them all over again. I also felt fired up about those colchicums. Next year, rolls of wire netting will be waiting for my new order, preferably with spikes. The optimist in me has revived, just as Chanticleer's Rosengarten would wish. The future is looking lilac-coloured, if not yet as glorious as he wished.

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Promoting nature-based, toxic-free land care practices for the health of people, their pets, and the planet.

Habitat Piles: Turning Garden Debris Into Shelter and Sculpture

At Chanticleer, this habitat pile sits among spring-bloomers. "Today, the stacks are part of what I call a carbon positive approach to maintenance as no fossil fuels are used, ever, only gardener power," says Chris Fehlhaber, who makes habitat piles every spring. Photo by Chris Fehlhaber.

This is part of a series with *Gardenista*, which ran on August 24, 2023.

With all the recent storms and severe weather happening, it feels like we're besieged with debris from trees and shrubs. Instead hauling it to the landfill, where it will just add to methane pollution, make something beautiful and beneficial out of it. In fact, keeping garden debris, or biomass (organic matter like branches, stems, and leaves), on your property is one of the principles of nature-based gardening we introduced in last month's column with Perfect Earth Project. Brush piles offer protection to birds, like wrens, thrushes, and warblers, and other wildlife, like amphibians, reptiles, and small mammals. Leaf litter becomes homes for insects. And when biomass decomposes, it feeds your soil—for free!

There are artful ways to display biomass in your garden. Take a cue from Edwina von Gal, founder of Perfect Earth Project, who constructs striking sculptures out of debris gathered from her yard on Eastern Long Island. She's woven branches through tree trunks, built walls out of logs, and knitted sticks together to create large nests. "Tailor the style of your habitat pile to the style of your garden," she says. If your garden is tightly managed, create something more deliberate, recommends von Gal. On the other hand, if you have a meadow or loosely planted beds, like von Gal has in her garden, you can be freer in your construction.

At Chanticleer garden in Wayne, PA, assistant horticulturist Chris Fehlhaber constructs a habitat pile each year after the meadow is cut back in early spring. (He waits as long as possible to cut back the meadow with a scythe to allow for overwintering insects to emerge.) To craft the stack, Fehlhaber drives a wood stake in the ground and builds around it so that it's sturdy and strong. "I start by creating a level base and then work around the pole in either a clockwise or counter-clockwise rotation to ensure there is plenty of overlap for strength, stability, and balance," he says. He continues the process until all the material is used. "Then, I gather woody debris from the previous year and 'top' the stack with it, arranging the branches on top to create a well-balanced dome, which helps weigh the top down and sit it neatly around the pole."

"Songbirds, insects, toads, and snakes have all been observed utilizing the stacks for shelter," says Fehlhaber. He's spied goldfinches using them to feed on seedheads in the meadow during fall and winter and to hide from predators, like red-tailed hawks. "The coarse nature of the stacks means there are many niches for birds and wildlife," he says.

Channel your inner Andy Goldsworthy or Maren Hassinger (see her inspiring exhibit at LongHouse Reserve, made from branches gathered on the property), and create art from nature. "Think of every fallen branch you find or invasive shrub you cut down, as a new opportunity," says von Gal. "Be creative and have fun."

Photos by Melissa Ozawa

Stack logs from fallen or diseased trees you removed to create walls or screens in your garden. They also provide habitat for native bees, chipmunks, and snakes. “Yes, you really do need snakes,” says von Gal. “They eat voles and other small critters, like white-footed mice, a primary vector of Lyme disease.” Here, a border of cutleaf coneflower (Rudbeckia laciniata) thrives behind the wall.

Instead of discarding the branches of non-native California privet (Ligustrum ovalifolium) she removed, von Gal wove them into the trunks of native Eastern red cedar trees (Juniperus virginiana).

This beautiful nest of pinecones, needles, and branches will breakdown over time, feeding the soil.

Several years ago when I was at Chanticleer, the dreamy garden in Wayne, PA, I fell for this simple habitat pile tucked away in the meadow. Chris Fehlhaber builds each stack around a center post. As the stack settles, gaps form around the post. "Bumblebees use this gap to gain access to the interior of the stack, which is likely relatively well-sheltered and dry, to make their nests," he says.

Edwina von Gal doesn't throw away anything from her garden. Clippings go into compost and any branches that fall or break from storms get turned into habitat piles that are embedded throughout her property on Eastern Long Island. She and her team love the process of knitting branches together to build this nest. "It's meditative," she says.

Photo by Chris Fehlhaber

In winter, Chanticleer's graphic habitat stacks become snow-covered sculpture