

Carlow Garden Festival 2026 Announces Star-Studded Line-Up for Nine Days of Gardening Inspiration

Joe Swift, James Alexander-Sinclair, Arit Anderson, Chris Beardshaw, Bunny Guinness and Tom Coward, amongst the headline UK names alongside Irish gardening experts Fiann O’Nualláin, Colm O’Driscoll, Jimi Blake, Oliver Schurmann, Helen Begadon, Daphne Shackleton and Mary Keenan.

From Saturday, 25th July to Sunday, 2nd August 2026, the beautiful gardens, historic estates and gardening attractions of County Carlow will once again provide the backdrop for one of Ireland's most celebrated gardening events as the Carlow Garden Festival returns with an exceptional programme of talks, tours, workshops and garden experiences.

Now firmly established as one of Ireland's leading garden festivals, the nine-day event will bring together internationally renowned garden designers, broadcasters and authors from Ireland and the United Kingdom, offering visitors a unique opportunity to learn from some of the most respected voices in gardening today.

Whether you are an experienced gardener, a complete beginner looking to gain confidence in your own garden, or simply someone who enjoys beautiful landscapes, nature and inspiring outdoor spaces, the Carlow Garden Festival has something to offer. The programme has been carefully designed to appeal to all levels of interest, combining practical gardening advice with fascinating stories of gardens from across Ireland, England and beyond. From garden history to design, creativity and sustainability, the festival explores a rich variety of themes.

The festival opens on Saturday, 25th July with a special headline event at Arboretum Home and Garden Heaven, Leighlinbridge. "*Keeping It Country – The James and Joe Garden Show*" will see two of the UK's most engaging gardening personalities, Joe Swift and James Alexander-Sinclair, take to the stage for what promises to be an insightful conversation on garden design full of humour, creativity and the changing world of gardening.

Award-winning garden designer and broadcaster Chris Beardshaw will bring his acclaimed talk "*Painting with Plants*" to Duckett's Grove Historic House and Walled Gardens on Sunday, July 26th 2026. Known for his inspirational approach to planting design, Beardshaw will explore the evolution of the English garden and reveal the principles behind creating beautiful and enduring planting schemes.

Visitors will also have the opportunity to hear from Tom Coward, Head Gardener at the world-famous Gravetye Manor, when he visits Huntington Castle on Monday, July 27th where he shares insights into managing one of Britain's most influential gardens, and the legacy of William Robinson, whose naturalistic approach transformed garden design.

One of the highlights of this year's Carlow Garden Festival is a special visit by John Anderson, gardener to King Charles III on Tuesday, July 28th. Set against the magnificent backdrop of Altamont Gardens, John's talk, *Gardens Along the Gulf Stream*, will draw on his experiences managing some of Britain and Ireland's most celebrated gardens, from Mount Usher and Inverewe to Exbury and the Savill Garden.

BBC Gardeners' World presenter and award-winning designer Arit Anderson, presents "*Designing with Plants: Why They Should Always Be the Star of the Garden*" at Borris House on Wednesday, July 29th, exploring how plants can transform garden design through beauty, resilience and sustainability.

The festival also welcomes two highly regarded plantsmen, Tom Brown and Jack Aldridge, to a special full-day event at Altamont Plants on Friday, July 31st. Jack's engaging presentation, *The*

Vanishing Garden, will share his personal selection of reliable, beautiful and hard-working plants that have stood the test of time, with insights gained from his work at RHS Garden Wisley and beyond. Meanwhile Tom Brown, Head Gardener at the celebrated West Dean Gardens in Sussex, offers practical insights drawn from his experience managing one of Britain's most admired gardening destinations. Alongside the talks, guests can enjoy live music from a jazz trio, browse an exhibition of botanical and animal works by acclaimed artist Jacinta Crowley Long and have lunch at the Sugar and Spice Café.

While the festival welcomes some of the biggest names from the UK gardening world, it also celebrates the exceptional expertise and creativity of Ireland's leading gardeners, plantspeople and designers. Visitors will have the opportunity to hear from renowned Irish plantsman Jimi Blake, creator of the acclaimed Hunting Brook Gardens, whose passion for unusual and exotic planting has inspired gardeners throughout Ireland and beyond. Award-winning garden designer Oliver Schurmann will share his expertise on creating beautiful and sustainable gardens in Hardymount Gardens, Colm O'Driscoll, Head Gardener in Lismore Castle and Gardens reflects on lessons learned from nature in his gardening journey at An Gairdín Beo and Helen Begadon reflects on *Healing Herbs as Nature's Pharmacy* in Kilgraney House and Herb Gardens.

This year the festival has added two additional events to the evening programme.

One of the highlights is *A Tale of a Country Garden Reimagined*, where renowned plantsman and designer Arthur Shackleton will share the story behind the remarkable restoration and development of the gardens at Sandbrook House, one of Ireland's finest Queen Anne country houses. Owned by the Bielenberg family, this special event, being held on Thursday, July 30th offers a great opportunity to visit this stunning property and gain insight into the vision and creativity that has transformed its gardens over the last ten years.

On Friday evening, July 31st Éanna Ní Lamhna is in Ballon Village, to discover some of Ballon's own biodiversity attractions, including the **Ballon Tree Trail**, a unique walk featuring twelve native Irish tree species that showcases how thoughtful planting can support wildlife and increase biodiversity within a village setting. A lovely route, the walk passes many heritage buildings and cultural attractions.

Throughout the festival events take place in some of the country's most spectacular and diverse garden settings including Altamont Gardens, Huntington Castle and Gardens, Borris House, Duckett's Grove, Delta Sensory Gardens, Hardymount Gardens, Arboretum Home and Garden Heaven, Kilgraney House and Herb Gardens and An Gairdín Beo Community Garden.

Robert Miller, Chairperson of the Carlow Garden Trail, said:

"The Carlow Garden Festival continues to grow in reputation because it offers something genuinely special. Visitors have the opportunity to meet and learn from some of the most respected names in gardening while experiencing the remarkable range of gardens that make County Carlow such an important gardening destination. Importantly, this is not a festival solely for expert gardeners. It's equally for those who might be taking their first steps in gardening or those looking for practical ideas for your own garden space, or simply enjoy spending time in beautiful places."

Michael Walsh, Chairperson of Carlow Tourism, added:

"The Carlow Garden Festival is one of the summer event highlights combining excellent speakers with exceptional gardens and garden centres, stunning landscapes and a warm Carlow welcome. The festival attracts dedicated gardeners from across Ireland, but it is equally appealing to visitors who simply appreciate nature, heritage and beautiful outdoor spaces. It provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy a short break in County Carlow while discovering why the county has earned its well-deserved reputation as a great gardening destination".

Throughout the festival, visitors can explore historic estates, woodland gardens, community gardens, sensory gardens, garden centres and nurseries while enjoying practical demonstrations, expert talks and guided experiences.

The full festival programme and ticket booking details are available at www.carlowgardentrail.com

The Carlow Garden Festival is supported by Carlow County Council and Fáilte Ireland under the Festival and Event Scheme and by Bord Bia.

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