



Bedgebury Pinetum is alive with the rich greens of the conifers and hollies at this time of year

Taking centre stage

Winter is a special time in the Weald, when garden structures and sculptures are revealed and the rich greens of conifers and hollies come into their own

Words by Caroline Edmunds pictures by Darryl Curcher

Winter is essential to our gardens and is also a resting period for our plants when they recuperate and gather strength.

In winter, interesting garden structures and sculptures previously hidden in the summer months by foliage, are revealed. Old statues, winding steps, walls, archways and paths come to life and take centre stage.

At this time of year, muddy tracks hardened by the frost give walkers a chance to explore the paths that criss-cross our countryside. Frosty bracken is crisp underfoot and the white frost shows off the pretty patterns of leaves. The evergreen Yew hedges, clipped to precision in some of the Weald's Victorian gardens, form an impressive boundary which the snow and frost love to cover.

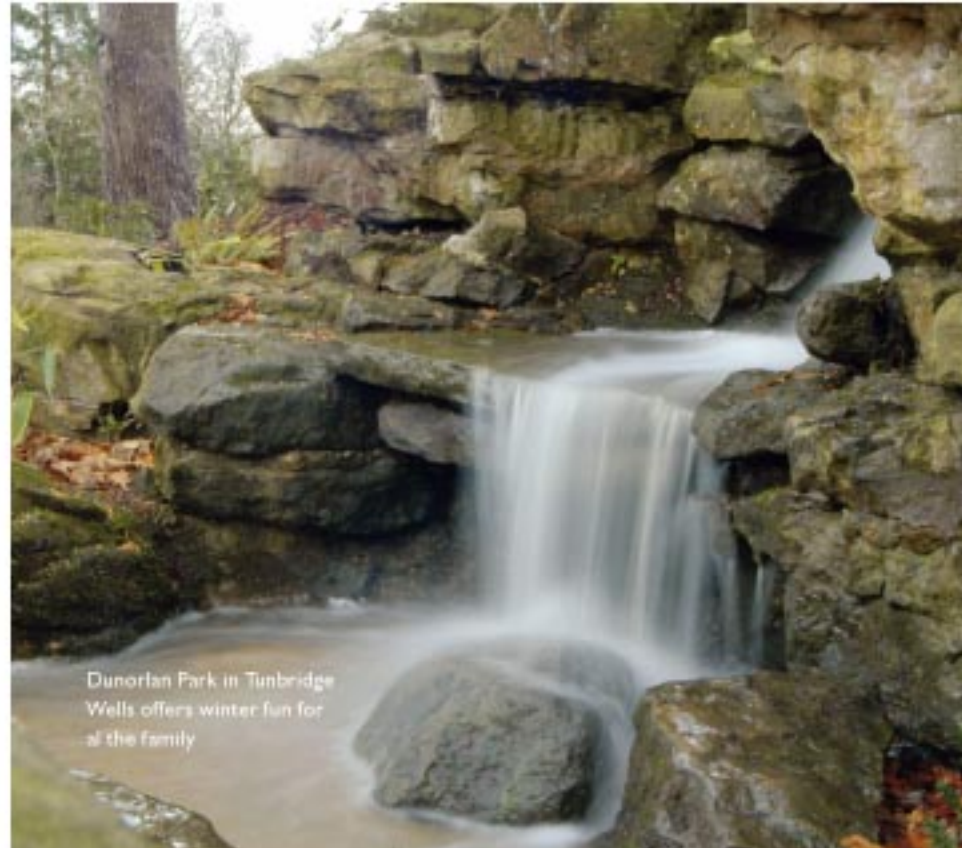
Buildings, too, show off their architecture at

this time of year helped by the shadows cast by the low winter sun. Kent's oast houses and many churches dominate the winter skyline in our Wealden villages and a walk through any of them will reveal some interesting architecture.

If you're lucky, you may see waxwings foraging for berries in wild hedgerows or in your garden and you can often hear the clear songs of thrushes, blackbirds, skylarks and great tits who sing on sunny winter days. Some birds, such as robins, wrens, rooks and hedge sparrows, are starting to form pairs for spring nesting.

In mild years, the occasional butterfly, such as the small tortoiseshell, may emerge prematurely in sheltered spots.

Plants continue to remain dormant and flowers are rare. However, hazel catkins, reminding us of childhood, and pretty snowdrops start to make their appearance.



Dunorlan Park in Tunbridge Wells offers winter fun for all the family



A walk in the Weald can take you to any of the Wealden villages, including Lamberhurst, Cranbrook, Tenterden or Goudhurst.

The church in the pretty village of Goudhurst looks down across the Weald and on a clear day you can see spires and towers of 51 churches. The Weavers' cottages are another interesting feature to discover when visiting this village and date from around 1350 when the Flemish weavers set up shop in Goudhurst and surrounding area.

The weaving of Kentish broadcloth continued for many years, bringing prosperity to the village. The weavers brought with them an interest in hop growing, and it became a major rural activity from the late 1700s.

Close to Goudhurst is Bedgebury, one of the Seven Wonders of the Weald, which is alive

places to walk with paths suitable for everyone.

A walk on the common can be combined with a one-hour guided stroll on the Pantiles on a Thursday or Saturday morning at 11.30am, when you can learn all about the historic spa town and what made it the place to be seen in when famous visitors included Queen Anne and Samuel Pepys.

You can just turn up and the cost is £3.50 for adults and £2.50 for children from the Tourist Information Centre on the Pantiles. Visit www.highweald.org for has some suggestions about different walks.

Close by are the magnificent High Rocks, which are open all year except Boxing Day and are steeped in history dating back millions of years. Acres of interesting sandstone rocks interlinked with 11 bridges provide a scenic

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with the rich greens of the conifers and hollies at this time of year. Visitors can also see the ornamental tree barks, with their rich browns and golds, and the dogwoods with their striking red and yellow stems.

The ducks, too, are a source of much amusement on Marshal's lake, waddling and sliding across the ice. The adventure playground is a welcome activity to help keep children warm and exercised in the winter, together with the cycle and walking trails.

Trees also look different when their spectacular barks come to life. Royal Tunbridge Wells common and Dunorlan Park are lovely

walk in a tranquil woodland setting. Once a Stone Age camp, now a national monument, they have always been a source of wonder and are open every day from 10am to dusk.

Knole Park in Sevenoaks is a lovely place to visit at any time of year, with plenty of wildlife. It is one of the few deer parks in England and the only medieval deer park in Kent to have survived the past 500 years (there were 700 deer parks in 16th-century England).

The deer in the park created a naturally ornamental landscape which prevented the setting being changed by the designers of the 18th century.



What's on in the Weald

The Heart of Kent website has details of all the attractions open to visitors this winter. For further information, visit: www.visitheartofkent.co.uk