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‘The trees are so diverse and intriguing’

Beale Arboretum, West Lodge Park, Cockfosters Road, Hadley Wood, London EN4 0PY



Picked by: *Matthew Biggs*,
garden writer and broadcaster

‘The arboretum has been in the Beale family for decades (since 1963) and covers 14ha (35 acres) inside the M25 – a fact that’s incredible in itself. It’s a fab place for a seasonal stroll, all year round. I aim to visit every month this coming year. You can go and wander about, or visit with more intent. It sits in the grounds of West Lodge Park Hotel so you can have a lovely cup of tea and cake afterwards, too.

‘I like the idea that it’s a private family passion, where the enthusiasm has been passed on from one generation to the next. The current owner, Andrew Beale, is so kind and willing to share; he showed me and Christine Walkden around just before Christmas last year, and he’s so passionate about it. They plant 50 trees every winter, including a Sequoia Avenue of giant redwoods to commemorate the arboretum’s 50th anniversary in 2013. It’s a weird and wonderful collection of *Sequoiadendron* cultivars, grown from wild seedlings by Martin Gardner in northern California.

‘The arboretum dates back to 1963 and there are 15 UK and regional Champion trees including *Fraxinus excelsior* ‘Westhof’s Glorie’, *Paulownia fortunei* Fast Blue (‘Minfast’) AGM, and *xCupressocyparis leylandii* ‘Castlewellan’. It holds three Plant

Heritage National Plant Collections: hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) cultivars, swamp cypress (*Taxodium*) species and cultivars, and *Catalpa*. There are familiar trees, too, such as apples and magnolias, eucalyptus and ginkgos, hazels, walnuts, whitebeams and rowans, dogwoods, ash, paulownias, robinias and monkey puzzle trees. The Pinetum is full of sought-after conifers such as *Picea abies* ‘Acrocona’ AGM, with its amazing long cones, elegant *Picea breweriana* AGM, *Fitzroya cupressoides* and Wollemi pine. Everything is labelled so it’s a great place to learn.’

FAQs

What’s the history? Arboretum established 1963 with help from Frank Knight, Director of RHS Garden Wisley and Derek Honour, Trees Consultant for the GLC; it has been developed by three generations of the Beale family. Trees now number 4,500, in 800 different taxa, many recorded in the Tree Register of the British Isles (Registered Collection 335).

Best bit? The conifers. It’s a fascinating and diverse collection, without being overwhelming.

Free entry for RHS Members? No

Contact details? 020 8216 3900; westlodgepark.co.uk/arboretum

Disabled access? Accessible parking and WC; guide dogs welcome.

Can I make a day of it? At 14ha (35 acres) there is plenty of scope for a two- to three-hour afternoon stroll. Delicious afternoon teas are served in restaurant every day; picnics available May–September.