



TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT *Paeonia mlokosewitschii*, from seed given to John's aunt by Lady Nicholson, direct from Sissinghurst; the crab apple makes jelly, a favourite for B&B visitors; John sources his magnolias from Cornwall from Burncoose, Trewithen and the Duchy Nursery; the *Malus floribunda* planted in 1964 by John's uncle. BELOW LEFT *Prunus pendula* 'Pendula Rosea' pinks things up. BELOW RIGHT The hot long south border.

Most gardens boast a blossom tree or two to herald the start of spring, but one garden on the Isle of Wight is awash with romantic early spring flowers and then blooms for months on end with a variety of fabulous trees and shrubs.

The glorious gardens at North Court Manor are just over two miles from the sea on the edge of the pretty, chocolate-box village of Shorwell, on the sheltered westerly side of the island. This magnificent manor house dates back to the early 17th century, built by the Deputy Governor of the island, Sir John Leigh, and now lived in by John and Christine Harrison.

Three eras of ancient apple trees with knarled trunks and branches, laden with lacy lichen and

fabulous clusters of soft pink, magenta and white blossom, season the lower levels and informal orchard. Pretty, pure white clusters of pear flowers, fabulous cherry blossom, spectacular camellias and some magnificent magnolias create stunning vistas within this amazing landscape. Every bursting flower bud is total perfection, showing an alternative, elegant side to these beautiful and mostly productive trees.

For a garden that highlights all that is great about spring blossom, North Court has to be a first choice for garden visitors. But there are other elements of this garden that are not immediately obvious that make it even more unique and quite remarkable. It is exceptional in that within its 14 acres there are two distinct and contrasting bands of soil. The alkaline

chalk that forms the basis of the soil on the cooler northern side of the garden facilitates the growth of prunus, but on the southern side of the garden and on the terraces above the house, a band of acidic upper greensand provides ideal conditions for one of the owners' favourite plant genus - magnolias - as well as other acid-loving delights such as rhododendrons and camellias. *Camellia sasanqua* 'Hugh Evans' starts flowering sometimes as early as November. The huge variation in pH allows John to practically grow any plant he desires, and that, coupled with the sheltered island position of the garden, encourages a vast array of Mediterranean and other slightly less hardy plants to thrive. It's a plant enthusiast's paradise and one of which the modest but highly

