



AMERICAN  
HORTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY

# Gardens of Grandeur: Châteaux and Gardens of the Loire Valley and Versailles

June 1 - 10, 2024

With American Horticultural Society  
Host Laura Dowling



Dear Friends,

I am delighted to invite you to join an extraordinary AHS journey to explore the magnificent gardens of the Loire Valley and Versailles.

We'll begin in the untouched region north of the Loire Valley at the enchanting annual Fête des Jardiniers at the splendid Château du Lude. As guests of Comte and Comtesse de Vanssay, and staying in their charming Château, we will have exclusive entrée to exquisite private gardens tucked away from the typical tourist destinations. Next, we will visit the Renaissance gardens of two of the finest Loire châteaux – including the famous potager at Villandry – on our way to our elegant accommodations at the Château d'Artigny. From here, we will explore Tours and visit the contemporary show gardens at the celebrated International Garden Festival at Chaumont-sur-Loire.

A highlight of our travels promises to be a visit to the enchanting Château de Chenonceau, where we'll enjoy a live floral demonstration. We will also be visiting the formal gardens and potager of magnificent Chambord and, by way of contrast, a delightful medieval-inspired manor garden. Versailles provides 'la grande finale,' with a stay at the 5-star Hotel Waldorf Trianon Palace and a morning dedicated to the Palace of Versailles and the superb formal gardens of André Le Notre.

While immersing ourselves in French gardens, cuisine, and culture, these once-in-a-lifetime experiences and engaging talks will offer invaluable perspectives and insights into France's horticultural legacy.

Hosting this exceptional program is AHS Board member Laura Dowling, an award-winning florist, designer, and passionate Francophile who studied French floral design in Paris for 15 years and served as the Chief Floral Designer at the White House from 2009 to 2015. Laura currently travels the world presenting design programs and organizing floral installations and special events.

Space is limited and our Travel Study programs often sell out, so please reserve as soon as possible. Bon voyage!

Most sincerely,



Suzanne Laporte  
President & CEO



# GARDENS OF GRANDEUR: CHATEAUX AND GARDENS OF THE LOIRE VALLEY AND VERSAILLES

WITH AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY HOST LAURA DOWLING



## Itinerary

### FRIDAY, MAY 31

Depart the United States on independent flights.

### SATURDAY, JUNE 1 — PARIS (L, D)

On arrival at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, transfer to the untouched region of the northern Loire and the Sarthe. Stay three nights privately at the beautifully furnished 16<sup>th</sup> century Château de la Barre as house guests of Comte and Comtesse, Guy and Marnie de Vanssay. Following lunch, take a walk through the gardens with the owners and discover the rich cultural history of this property – Guy de Vanssay is the 20<sup>th</sup> generation to have resided in the Château. In the evening reconvene for welcome drinks followed by dinner in the Grand Salon.



### SUNDAY, JUNE 2 – LE LUDE, LE PETIT BORDEAUX (B, D)

Depart for nearby Château du Lude to attend the annual Fête des Jardiniers. For more than 25 years, the garden festival has brought together exhibiting nurseries and horticulturists, with collections of plants displayed in the splendid gardens of the Château du Lude. Enjoy lunch independently at the Fête des Jardiniers. This afternoon, continue to the romantic shade garden of 'Le Petit Bordeaux'. Started in 1987, it is a mature garden, full of trees underplanted with hydrangeas, day lilies, hostas,

ancient roses, acers, and dogwoods. The garden is focused around a beautiful Périgordien style house. Return to Château de la Barre, where this evening, Tour Manager and Garden Historian Amy Kupec Larue will give an introductory talk on the gardens of the Loire Valley, followed by an informal wine and cheese tasting supper at the Château.

### MONDAY, JUNE 3 – SASNIERES, LE MANS (B, L, D)

Discover the English style garden, Plessis Sasnières. Take a tour of the timeless garden created around a lake, with fine herbaceous borders, garden rooms, and a potager garden, and enjoy the peaceful atmosphere. The abundance of rose bushes – ancient and modern varieties – are subtly combined with perennials. Continue for a private lunch at 18<sup>th</sup> century Château Chène de Coeur hosted by the owners, followed by a walk in the gardens. This afternoon, explore nearby Le Mans, the old 'Plantagenet City' and birthplace of Henri II of England, with its Gallo-Roman walls - the most extensive remaining in France - and the myriad of beautifully restored medieval streets. Return to Château de la Barre and enjoy dinner in a nearby restaurant.

### TUESDAY, JUNE 4 – MONTOIRE, MONTBAZON (B, L, D)

Check out of Château de la Barre and depart for Montoire. Visit Chapelle Saint Gilles and discover its early 12<sup>th</sup> century frescoes. Following lunch in a local restaurant, in Chançay visit Château de Valmer, a marvel of the Italian Renaissance. Surrounded by a wine estate of Vouvray, the Château has extensive gardens on eight levels of terraces, along with an extensive vegetable garden and a rare troglodytic chapel dating from 1524. Traveling south past Tours, arrive at the 5-star elegant Belle Époque Hotel Château d'Artigny for a four-night stay. All the rooms are elegantly decorated and offer beautiful views over the Indre, the garden, or the park. Dine this evening at the hotel.

### WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5 - VILLANDRY, RIVAU (B, L, D)

Depart for the glorious and most famous of all 'potager' gardens in France - Villandry. The garden consists of nine squares planted with vegetables and flowers of contrasting colors, which gives the impression of a multi-colored checkerboard. The many crosses in the kitchen garden are reminiscent of the ancient monastic origins of the potager gardens. Following lunch in the café restaurant, continue to Château du Rivau, the French Renaissance castle, for a tour with the owner through the gardens inspired by fairy tales and medieval legends. Return to the hotel for some time at leisure before dinner.

### THURSDAY, JUNE 6 – TOURS, CHAUMONT (B, L)

This morning, enjoy a guided walking tour of Tours to include visits to the Museum of Fine Arts and the Cathedral of St. Gatiens, built between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries on the remains of an ancient Gallo-Roman city. There will be time at leisure to explore Tours independently before lunch in a local restaurant. This afternoon, visit Chaumont and the unique contemporary show gardens of the International Garden Festival at the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire. Each year there is a showcase of display gardens created by landscape architects, designers, and artists, inspired by the annual theme of the show. Return to the hotel for an independent dinner.



### FRIDAY, JUNE 7 – GAILLARD, AMBOISE, CHENONCEAU (B, L)

Visit Château Gaillard, one of the first Renaissance Gardens in France designed by Dom Pacello Mercogliano, Europe's most famous garden designer, who acclimatized the first ever orange and lemon trees in France in the year 1500 using heated greenhouses and crate planters. Enjoy lunch in Amboise with time for a walk through the town. Leave for Château de Chenonceau to visit the stunning castle and gardens of Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de Medici. The gardens are ornamented with shrubs and climbing roses and in early summer, the flower beds feature over 30,000 flowers. The maze, lined with taxus baccata, has been replanted according to Catherine de Medici's original plans. By special arrangement, meet with Jean-François Boucher, Master Craftsman of France, who is responsible for the floral arrangements in the Château. Return to the hotel for an independent dinner.



### SATURDAY, JUNE 8 – CHAMBORD, CHARTRES, VERSAILLES (B, L, D)

Check out of the hotel and drive to Chambord, the largest Château in the Loire Valley. Built to serve as a hunting lodge for Francis I, visit its historical formal gardens and potager. Continue to Chartres to see the world-famous Cathedral, an architectural masterpiece of sculptural detail and stained-glass and a sanctuary of mysticism and spirituality. Following lunch independently, visit the Manoir Bois Richeux. See the enchanting medieval-inspired garden with an intimate courtyard arranged in front of the Manor, divided into three: the herb garden, the meadows, and the kitchen garden.

Travel on to Versailles and stay at the 5-star Hotel Waldorf Trianon Palace. Set on the ground floor of a historic 17<sup>th</sup> century palace, this impressive hotel blends elements of Art Deco with contemporary furnishings and grandeur. Dine independently this evening.

### SUNDAY, JUNE 9 – VERSAILLES (B, D)

This morning is dedicated to a guided visit of the Palace of Versailles. From the central window in the Hall of Mirrors, see the Grande Perspective stretching away towards the horizon, its magnificent and immense formal gardens designed by André Le Nôtre. The guided visit will continue through the gardens including the parterres, the orangery, and the fountains. Lunch independently and enjoy the afternoon at leisure before gathering for farewell drinks and dinner.

### MONDAY, JUNE 10 - VERSAILLES / PARIS / USA (B)

This morning, check out of the hotel for an organized transfer to Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport for independently booked flights home.

**Program Revisions:** While revisions of this itinerary are not anticipated, the AHS and its travel partners reserve the right to make changes, with or without notice, that may become necessary.

### AHS Travel Study Activity Level Description:

AHS Travel Study programs are designed to offer immersive experiences and often involve long days filled with exploration and extensive walking on uneven terrain. To participate in a program, it is recommended to be in good physical condition and prepared to walk for a minimum of two miles each day.

# GARDENS OF GRANDEUR: CHÂTEAUX AND GARDENS OF THE LOIRE VALLEY AND VERSAILLES

**Tour: June 1 - 10, 2024**

With AHS Host Laura Dowling

## JOIN US FOR EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES, INCLUDING:

- Attend the annual Fête des Jardiniers in the splendid gardens of Château du Lude
- Visit legendary Villandry, famous for its Renaissance style potager of ornamental cultivars
- Visit Château de Chenonceau, the stunning castle and gardens of Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de Medici
- See the unique contemporary show gardens of the International Garden Festival at the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire
- The Palace of Versailles will provide 'la grande finale'

## OUR ACCOMMODATIONS:

Stay privately and exclusively at 16<sup>th</sup> century **Château de la Barre**, hosted by the owners, and enjoy the ornate reception rooms, majestic fireplaces, antique furniture, and decorative arts in the bedrooms. The well-maintained fragrant gardens and a swimming pool are set amidst a 100-acre park.

**Château d'Artigny**, a 5-star elegant Belle Époque hotel near Tours. All the rooms are elegantly decorated and offer beautiful views over the Indre, the garden, or the park.

The 5-star **Hotel Waldorf Trianon Palace** is located between the Palace of Versailles and the Trianon. Its proximity to the Palace, the elegance of the hotel and its spa facilities combine to make it a perfect location for the members' final stay of the tour.

## PRICING AND PAYMENT INFORMATION

**Price: \$12,595 per person**

**Single Supplement: \$2,050 per person**

**The tour price includes a \$500 per person non-refundable tax-deductible donation to the AHS. The AHS team will be in touch to process your trip donation at the time of final payment.**

We highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. One travel insurance provider to consider is USI Affinity Travel Insurance Services. For more information on the plan for AHS travelers, visit [www.ahsgardening.org/travel](http://www.ahsgardening.org/travel).

Information is also available at this link regarding optional flight and travel arrangement services.

**This AHS Travel Study program is offered in collaboration with Specialtours.**



## PRICE INCLUDES:

- Accommodation as per the itinerary
- Transportation as per the itinerary
- Group airport transfers
- All buffet breakfasts
- 7 lunches and 6 dinners including wine, water, and coffee
- 2 drink receptions
- All entrance fees as per the itinerary
- Porterage at the hotels
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, and in restaurants
- Whisper system headsets
- The services of local guides
- The services of your Specialtours Tour Manager
- \$500 of your payment per person is a non-refundable tax-deductible contribution to the American Horticultural Society.

## PRICE EXCLUDES:

- Flights from USA to Paris and return
- Insurance
- Any meals indicated as independent
- Personal extras
- Housekeeping tips

Please refer to the enclosed reservation form for instructions for reserving your place on this AHS Travel Study program. For further information contact [AHS@specialtours.co.uk](mailto:AHS@specialtours.co.uk) or 011 44 20 7386 4690.

## When you travel with the AHS, you make a difference.

Designed for garden enthusiasts who love to explore horticultural wonders around the world, AHS Travel Study offers exceptional programs that include many exclusive experiences and unique insights. Your participation in an AHS Travel Study program supports the AHS's nonprofit work to increase knowledge among gardeners, inspire passion for plants and the natural world, and encourage responsible stewardship of the earth.

For more information about AHS Travel Study programs, please contact [travel@ahsgardening.org](mailto:travel@ahsgardening.org) or (703) 768-5700, ext. 117. Information is also available at [www.ahsgardening.org/travel](http://www.ahsgardening.org/travel).