ADMIRABLE TREES

CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

ESTATE OF VERSAILLES

WITH PATRONAGE OF
MAISON RÉMY MARTIN

ARBRES ADMIRABLES I
DOMAINE DE VERSAILLES

THE HISTORY OF FRANCE FROM TREE TO TREE

Established in 1724 and granted Royal Approval in 1738 by Louis XV, Maison Rémy Martin shares with the Palace of Versailles an absolute respect of time, a spirit of openness and innovation, a willingness to pass on its exceptional knowledge and respect for the environment – all of which are values that connect it to the Admirable Trees of Versailles.

Trees have so many stories to tell, hidden away in their shadows. At Versailles, these stories combine into a veritable epic, considering that some of its trees have, from the tips of their leafy crowns, seen the kings of France come and go, observed the Revolution, lived through two World Wars and witnessed the nation's greatest dramas and most joyous celebrations.

Strolling from tree to tree is like walking through part of the history of France, encompassing the influence of Louis XIV, the experiments of Louis XV, the passion for hunting of Louis XVI, as well as the great maritime expeditions and the antics of Marie-Antoinette.

It also calls to mind the unending renewal of these fragile giants, which can be toppled by a strong gust and need many years to grow back again.

Pedunculate oak, Trianon forecourts; planted during the reign of Louis XIV, in 1668, this oak is the doyen of the trees on the Estate of Versailles

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From the French-style gardens in front of the Palace to the English garden at Trianon, the Estate of Versailles is dotted with extraordinary trees. Originally featuring mainly limes and chestnut trees from the local area, the arboreal heritage of Versailles has been enriched by rare species from faraway lands, such as cedars of Lebanon, Virginia tulip and juniper trees, Japanese pagoda trees… Although some historical trees did not survive the storm of 1999, several of the most remarkable specimens did manage to escape and can still be admired today.

1. Giant sequoia,
Jussieu's Orangery Parterre,
Estate of Trianon

2. Virginia juniper,
English garden,
Estate of Trianon

FROM 1661, LOUIS XIV BRINGS TREES TO VERSAILLES FROM ALL OVER FRANCE

He loved them and wanted to have lots of them in the gardens, which he commissioned André Le Nôtre (1613-1700) to design from 1661. But the marshy ground was not that suitable. Consequently, a number of full-size adult trees were dug up from the forests of Normandy and replanted at Versailles.

The enormous means of transport arranged to move them were really quite striking. Claude Desgots recalled how the King "stripped the countryside for 20 miles around of chestnut trees and limes". The Duke of Saint-Simon also wrote of these "ready-made forests in bunches", containing "great trees from Compiègne, and much further afield, arriving non-stop and more than three-quarters of which would die and have to be instantly replaced". The shipments of trees came from Artois, Flanders and Dauphiné. The Prince of Nassau's gardener was brought on board, as he knew how to "transplant the biggest trees without any harm befalling them".

Nurseries were set up, which helped boost homegrown tree production over time. An early site was established at Saint-Antoine gate, where, from 1693, vast areas of land were set aside to supply all of the royal estates with trees and shrubs. Officials in provinces throughout France sent seeds and young plants. In the 1730s, more than 60 ha of the Estate were given over to their cultivation. According to a contract in 1755, these Versailles nurseries were able to supply, annually, "thirty thousand trees of all species and sizes, ten thousand fruit trees, three hundred thousand hornbeams, one hundred thousand oaks or chestnut trees, five hundred


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1. ***Isometric view of the Palace, lower gardens and the town of Saint-Cloud*** (detail), circa 1675, by Étienne Allegrain (1644-1736); oil on canvas

2. Engraving taken from *Instructions for fruit and vegetable gardens, with a treatise on orange trees, followed by some reflections on agriculture, by Mr de La Quintinie, director of the King's fruit and vegetable gardens* (detail), Volume I, Part 3, Claude Barbin, ed., 1690

THE THREE DISTINCT SECTIONS AT THE PARK OF VERSAILLES

The Park of Versailles is a typical example of a formal garden, laid out along strict lines on either side of a central axis and designed as an extension of the buildings. It comprises three distinct sections: the open spaces, featuring parterres of boxwood and flowers, designed to be contemplated from the windows of the Palace; the groves – architectural bridges between the parterres and the tall trees surrounding them. Like open-air rooms hidden within wooded areas, they are designed for fun; the forest, crossed by wide, straight walkways designed for fox-hunting.


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thousand thorny plants, ornamental elms, maples and others in racks, and five hundred bunches of boxwood".

The Palace gardeners coped with all this intense activity and came up with increasingly ingenious solutions, for example in transporting the trees by designing special vehicles, and in terms of the size of the plants, by making double-height ladders.

As for Jean-Baptiste de La Quintinie (1624-1688), he turned the Versailles vegetable garden into a veritable open-air laboratory from 1678. He was the first to highlight the role of sap in the cropping and fruiting of fruit trees, and drew attention to their root system and the precautions to be taken when transplanting them.

LOUIS XV'S PASSION FOR BOTANY AND RARE SPECIES

From 1750, he tasked gardener-florist Claude Richard (1705-1784) with developing an experimental garden close to Grand Trianon. Greenhouses were erected for cultivating hitherto obscure species, such as coffee beans, cherries and peaches. Initially a fruit and vegetable garden, it took on a more botanical character with the arrival, in 1759, of Bernard de Jussieu (1699-1777), and then became the main experimental ground of the time.

The mid-18th century was a period of major scientific expeditions overseas. Hadn't the *Lumières* (Enlighteners) demanded to know more about far-off lands? With the King's support, naturalists joined forces with astronomers, physicians and artists, and set sail on vessels chartered from the navy. Most notably, Antoine Richard (1735-1807), Claude's son and a student of Jussieu, was dispatched by Louis XV on a mission to the Balearic Islands, Spain and Portugal. Seeds and dried plants, in the form of herbariums and cuttings, were loaded on to the boats extremely carefully. Discussions with foreign botanists, such as the Swede Carl von Linné (1707-1778), and interested seafarers, such as Admiral de la Galissonnière contributed to the expansion of the Trianon collection. By the time of the King's death, it comprised 4,000 different varieties of plant, making it the most famous collection in Europe.

Here, the utilitarian as well as decorative attributes of these new plants were discovered. The white birch proved to be effective in the treatment of skin disorders, while the prevalent white pine helped meet the urgent demand for wood in the ship-building industry. As for


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1. Bernard de Jussieu (1699-1777), French botanist, by Ambroise Tardieu (1788-1841); engraving

EPIC VOYAGE

Sometimes to the annoyance of the captain, whose voyage, he felt, was constantly being interrupted by stopovers and his vessel laden down with crates, pots and wicker baskets, the cuttings were treated with the greatest of reverence. So that they could get the light they needed to survive, where possible they were installed on the upper deck, protected from spray, gusts of wind and birds. Naturally, they had to be watered regularly. And then there were the whims of the naturalist, the great scholar who was so full of himself. Despite the patience of the sailors, only 5% of the plants survived the voyage.

On arrival in port, the ones that did make it were not planted into the ground straight away. They wouldn't have been able to cope with the new environment, so they were cultivated. At Trianon, they were placed in warm greenhouses, which, in 1762, accommodated fig, coffee and pineapple plants…

the magnolia, it was widely used in English-style gardens, which had become the fashion.

Orders placed between 1753 and 1772 shed a little more light on the trees that made up the Palace gardens at the time. The groves in particular contained limes, sycamores, "white-woods", ash and chestnut trees. The interior palisades were planted with yew, chestnut trees and boxwood. Those around them contained hornbeams and elms, in addition to limes and sycamores. The Royal Way was bordered with elms and the Grand Canal with "white-woods", while spruces could be found in certain specific areas of the gardens, such as by the railings of the Latona fountain. Finally, the parterres were decorated with clipped yew and dwarf boxwood.

The woods in the Park, meanwhile, were composed mainly of oaks and chestnut trees. At the time of Louis XIV's death, they were known to cover 4,963 acres (2,534 ha) of the Estate's entire area, but note had already been taken of their parlous condition, due to advanced age, the big freeze of 1709 and general wear and tear. The situation really started to become worrying in the 1760s.

IN 1774, LOUIS XVI REPLANTS THE ENTIRE PARK AT VERSAILLES

MARIE-ANTOINETTE HAD AN ENGLISH PARK DESIGNED FOR PETIT TRIANON

Having been gifted the Petit Trianon by her husband upon her ascent to the throne, the young queen threw herself enthusiastically into reorganising Louis XV's estate. She got rid of the botanic garden – whose countless treasures were relocated to Paris, to the present-day Jardin des Plantes – and tore down its extraordinary installations.

The Duke of Croÿ looked on, bitterly: "I thought I was going mad, or dreaming, when I found, in place of the most productive and valuable greenhouse in Europe, rather high mountains, a large rock and a river." In fact, an Anglo-Oriental garden had been designed by the Count of Caraman and created by Antoine Richard and the architect Richard Mique, together with Hubert Robert, who arranged it around a pond, on the edges of which, from 1783, the cottages of the Queen's Hamlet were built.

This time, the trees that had been planted found favour with the Duke of Croÿ, who singled out the alpine feel, which chimed with the pastoral style in fashion at the time: "What is superb is that Monsieur Richard has indulged his taste and his skill and has introduced magnificent and rare trees of all types […] There are especially pines, larch, then, moving upwards, large firs, then small-leaved stunted firs, then what are known in the country as alders."

Large-scale felling was required to tackle the state of decay of the trees. It was given the go-ahead by the new King from the end of 1774. Two paintings by the artist Hubert Robert depicted the upheaval the gardens endured, although it was all to preserve Le Nôtre's work rather than give in to the prevailing Anglomania.

Nevertheless, certain things were updated in line with the fashion of the time. This work was carried out in the groves with the help of Abbot Nolin, agronomist and "decorator of the King's gardens". In particular, the Labyrinth grove was destroyed to make way for the Venus grove – now the Queen's grove – where, as was the case in the landscaped gardens, exotic species were carefully installed.

The Royal Estates accounts for 1776 recorded that 280,000 oaks were planted.

The King's passion for hunting lay behind his desire to significantly rearrange the Estate. The hunting grounds were extended through the acquisition of a further 4,400 acres – more than half of them wooded – added to which were the forests claimed from the Park by installing new fencing. Thus, in 1778, the wooded portion of the Estate covered 9,545 acres (4,874 ha).

1. ***Entrance of the green carpet at Versailles*** (détail), 1777, by Hubert Robert (1733-1808); oil on canvas; the painting depicts the "green carpet" during the felling of trees (winter 1774-1775) in the gardens of Versailles; in the foreground are Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette

2. ***View of the Apollo's Baths grove*** (detail), 1777, by Hubert Robert (1733-1808); oil on canvas

AFTER THE REVOLUTION, THE PARK GOES TO RACK AND RUIN

In the Park at Versailles, “the axe is poised at the foot of the trees lining its great avenues,” stated the administrator Charles Delacroix, who, in 1793, was threatening to “churn up” the Park and “break the spell that seems to be retaining all the embellishments from the time of the tyrants”.

The woods of the Park were chopped down for the ship-building industry, the fruit trees were planted in incongruous spots like along the edge of the Grand Canal and the Apollo fountain, but it was still possible to visit the groves, to which the guards had the keys. Antoine Richard was able to remain in post and take care of the exotic trees, which he himself had planted at Petit Trianon.

In 1802, Napoleon I ordered that the end of the Grand Canal be planted with poplars from Italy, which actually originated in Asia and were highly prized in the 19th century. To make way for them, the gardener Lelieur did not hesitate to sacrifice the young elms that had been planted there some years earlier by Trianon gardener, Jean Duchesne.


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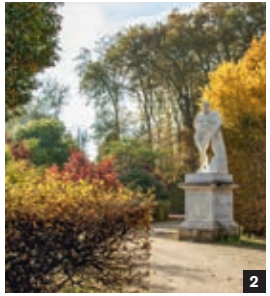
LOUIS XVIII SORTS OUT THE KING’S GARDEN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In 1818, this landscaped garden replaced the Royal Isle fountain and gathered together a remarkable collection of exotic species. Steam navigation meant more new plants, particularly flowers, could be imported from all over the world, and this contributed to the serene atmosphere sought by the Romantic movement. The harmony between quantities and colours of the different plants was particularly well thought out in this garden.

FROM MATURITY TO REPLANTING

Largely untouched for much of the 19th century, the Park saw its trees reach maturity. For the purpose of regeneration, a new planting was undertaken between 1863 and 1880 under the direction of architect Charles-Auguste Questel, which was followed by the restoration of the gardens by Pierre de Nolhac, starting in 1887.

1. ***The open space in front of the Grand Trianon*** (detail), 1810, by Jean Bidauld (1758-1846) and Antoine Vernet (1758-1836); oil on canvas

2. King’s Garden, grove on the southern edge of the gardens at the Palace of Versailles

THE STORMS OF 1990 AND 1999 DECIMATE THE WOODLAND

During the night of 25 to 26 December 1999, more than 18,000 plants were destroyed by a storm that battered the north of France. Historical trees were lost forever, such as the Virginia tulip tree planted during Marie-Antoinette's time and the Corsican pine that was the final witness to Napoleon I's stay at Petit Trianon.

But unexpected resources came to the trees' aid, whose destruction prompted a wave of solidarity on an international scale. Between 2000 and 2003, funds of more than €2.5 million were raised and 10,000 trees were replanted. Around the world, 5,000 private individuals, as well as various large companies, answered the call to restore the Park to its former glory.

1. The botanical heritage of the Estate of Versailles was destroyed by the storm of 25 and 26 December 1999

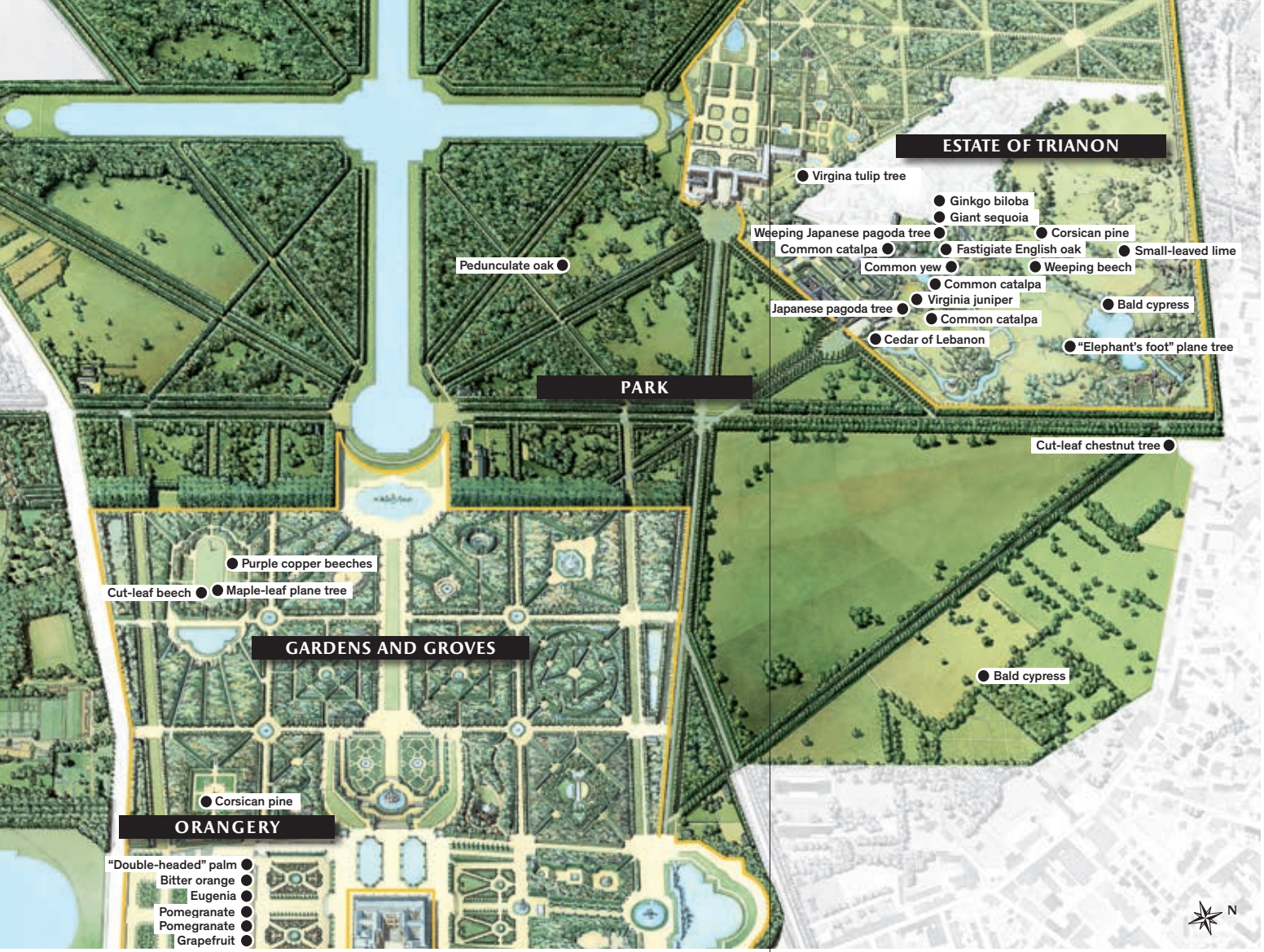
2. *Between bark and bark (Tra scorza e scorza),* Giuseppe Penone; work displayed on the Water parterre during the modern-art exhibition *Giuseppe Penone at Versailles*, held from June to October 2013

3. The botanical heritage of the Estate of Versailles in June 2019

The proceeds of an auction of the most beautiful of the uprooted historical trees went towards replacing these with the same species. One of the buyers, the artist Giuseppe Penone, would return 13 years later with one of the great cedars to exhibit it at the Palace. Hollow, it served as a container for a healthy young tree. "Some day, this tree will be big enough to touch the bronze bark."

THE RESTORATION OF THE PARK

Ironically, the 1990 storm, and especially the one in 1999, focused attention on the fragility of the 130-year-old trees. It was high time they were replaced. Even better, the storms provided the opportunity to recreate parts of the garden in their 18th century state, particularly the English garden at the Petit Trianon, the whole of the Grand Trianon park and the groves. Today, the botanical heritage of the Estate of Versailles is in good health and its trees, replanted 20 years ago, are evidence of that.



ARBRES ADMIRABLES I

DOMAINE DE VERSAILLES

TREES WORTH REMARKING ON

"In the tree kingdom, roles are evenly assigned. You can tell who is the monarch and who are the great lords and barons, the Court and the myriad minor powdered and delicate marquis filling the corridors," begins Robert Bourdu, in his essay on the yew,* which, according to the author, serves as "the indispensable confessor, discreet wielder of power".

The oak, again according to the author, holds pride of place. The beech and lime form part of its personal guard and the conifers are its orderly troops, while the cedars, sequoias and old plane trees "ambassadors from faraway lands, exotic and mysterious".

* Robert Bourdu, *L'If (The Yew)*, ed. Actes Sud, 1997

WITH PATRONAGE OF MAISON RÉMY MARTIN

BITTER ORANGE
CITRUS X AURANTIUM

The bitter orange is acknowledged as the official ancestor of the orange. Louis XIV adored this fruit with its colour of the sunset – his emblem. So he had his architect, Jules Hardouin-Mansart, build a magnificent new orangery in 1684.

At the Palace, where many different aromas mingled, several boxed bitter orange trees gave off their perfume. A slightly bitter essence could be extracted from its delicate flowers and members of the Court would cloud themselves in this "Neroli", named after the princess of Nerola, who made it fashionable in the 18th century.

From the late 15th century, King Charles VIII, returning from his campaign in Italy, encouraged the development of "stores" with as many south-facing windows as possible. The first of these was, of course, the one at his residence, Château d'Amboise, but it wasn't a patch on what was later installed at Versailles, the scale of which was unprecedented. Relocated from the Orangery to the parterre in summer, the bitter oranges perfumed the air all around. With their smooth trunks, which darken with age and thus contrast beautifully with their foliage, they were dotted among the swirls of the lawn.

This citrus plant, which is native to South-East Asia, likes warm climates but is nevertheless resistant to cold. It has an extraordinary life expectancy, even when boxed. The Orangery at Versailles was once home to the "Constable", which, it is said, was more than 470 years old when it died.

COMMON CATALPA
CATALPA BIGNONIOIDES

The catalpa has very large leaves and clusters of flowers, which, at the end of the summer, turn into elongated bean-like pods full of seeds. That's probably what the word "catalpa" meant to the Native American Indians in Carolina, in the southern United States, from where the tree originates. In fact, it is one of the rare species to have kept its original name on being brought to England in 1726 and then to France in 1754.

Modestly sized, it struggles to reach 15 metres in height: the two examples that face each other in the English garden at Trianon are 10 and 12 metres, respectively, while the one in the Queen's Theatre soars to 20 metres. Its majestic frame, often quite broad, and its trimmings – large, verdant leaves, delicate and frilly white flowers edged in purple and gold – make this a highly prized ornamental tree, to the extent that, in parks, it is recommended that it be planted in isolation so that its effect can be fully appreciated.

It is designated a "bignonioide" because of an odd semantic detour in reference to the trumpet-shaped bignonia flower. The von Linné classification, to which many plants owe their names today, is to do with how they pollinate and the characteristics of their flowers.

CEDAR OF LEBANON
CEDRUS LIBANI

Legend has it that Bernard de Jussieu (1699-1777) himself planted this cedar of Lebanon in 1772. However, an in-depth study dated this 30-metre tree to 1840.

Nevertheless, it was the famous botanist from the Jardin des Plantes in Paris who introduced the species to France, in the early 18th century. To get it, he went to England, which prided itself on having had many of these Mount Lebanon natives since 1638. In 1734, Bernard Jussieu brought back two cedar saplings from London, which had been kindly donated by the director of Kew gardens. Did he drop them? Did the water run out of the pots? No – as he later recounted, he arrived with his precious cargo lodged safely in his hat.

In the 19th century, the Cedar forest was an unmissable stopover on voyages to the Orient. For the Romantics, it was a special place for meditating on the cycle of civilisations and the precariousness of greatness. "They are divine beings in the form of trees," wrote Lamartine of the cedars, during his tour in 1833. To the people of the Middle East, the trees were sages and prophets.

PEDUNCULATE OAK
QUERCUS ROBUR

With its magnificent structure and more than 350 years of age, the oak is the doyen of the trees at Versailles. According to dendrochronological studies, it was grown from seed planted in 1670 and so would have been party to discussions between Louis XIV and André Le Nôtre about the construction of the Park. Did the most powerful king in Europe lean against the young tree, perhaps, imagining his great future?

Strangely, there is no mention of it in the Palace archives, which may have saved it for a long time from being inappropriately pruned, which would have thwarted its development.

Today, it stands 36 metres tall – a remarkable height for this species – and the circumference of its trunk measures 5.24 metres. It is called a "pedunculate" oak because its acorns are on the end of long peduncles, or lobes, of between 2 and 10 cm.

Dedicated to Zeus by the Greeks and to Jupiter by the Romans, the oak, with its strong and unyielding wood, symbolises power and majesty. Its serrated leaves, like those of holly and laurel, are used as a decorative motif. From the 18th century, it became a symbol of merit and then victory. It appears on military objects – on generals' caps and the Legion of Honour medal – and can be seen in various places around the Palace where brave warrior deeds are celebrated.

FASTIGIATE ENGLISH OAK
QUERCUS ROBUR 'FASTIGIATA'

A fastigiate English oak is so called because it grows in the shape of a flame or torch. This is not its natural growth pattern and has to be cultivated in a nursery. The oak planted close to Jussieu's Orangery most probably came from Louis XV's nurseries at Trianon; it germinated in 1768, in fact. It stopped growing at around 30 metres tall and its trunk measures 5.13 metres, one metre up from the ground.

BALD CYPRESS
TAXODIUM DISTICHUM

In reality, this is a member not of the cypress family but of the Taxodiaceae, like the sequoia. It's a conifer, yet it loses its leaves in autumn. It's obviously a tree that likes to be contrary!

Furthermore, its roots, rather than lying deep in the soil, come out above ground. Knee-like protuberances help the tree capture the oxygen required by this species, which is native to marshland and normally stands in water! These roots also help anchor it in soil softened by humidity. It's no wonder this inhabitant of the Queen's Hamlet was planted on the edge of a lake, probably in the early 19th century. As far back as 1857, visitor guides to the Palace were encouraging people to go and admire it.

The bald cypress originates from Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida and was brought to England by Charles I's gardener, John Tradescant II, in around 1640. In France, in 1788, it was classified among the "precious trees" in the Sèvres nursery managed by the Englishman John Williams. The example in the sheep's meadow almost certainly comes from the nurseries set up in this area in the 19th century.

EUGENIA
SYZYGIUM PANICULATUM

A native of Oceania, this tree owes its name to Prince Eugene (1663-1736), general field marshall of the imperial army of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, who spent his childhood at the French court.

Like the yew, it is perfect for topiary – its shrubbery forms many of the silhouettes to be found all over the Palace gardens. It is hardy, can grow to a good size without its branches thickening and its small leaves stay compact, retaining the shape they were given. Its severe appearance complements the baroque allure of the pomegranates.

In the summer, it is bursting with white flowers, which produce small red fruit.

VIRGINIA JUNIPER
JUNIPERUS VIRGINIANA

As its name suggests, this tree comes from North America. The circumstances of its arrival in Europe remain subject to debate, but there was mention of it in England in 1664. In France, von Linné gave a very precise description in 1750 of a specimen in the Jardin des Plantes, in Paris. At Versailles, a 1777 order from the royal nurseries for Marie-Antoinette's English garden lists two "red cedars", so-called because of the colour of their wood. Finally, the post-Revolution inventory of 1795 indicates several Virginia junipers at Trianon.

This specimen was definitely planted during the restoration of the Estate of Trianon ordered by Napoleon I in 1810, when he gifted it to his wife, Marie-Louise. In fact, the Virginia juniper was cultivated in the nearby nursery where, in 1819, more than 1,000 plants were recorded. Already nicknamed "the old tree" on postcards in the 1900s, the tree was heavily damaged in the storm of 1999, but is still alive thanks to the bracket installed to prop it up. The cambium, which is the part of the trunk that surrounds the sap and where the cells that govern growth and thickness develop, is still connected to the roots and leaves, meaning photosynthesis, which is crucial to its survival, can take place.

The Virginia juniper has many attributes. Its wood, which mites don't like, is used to make clothing chests. This is why it symbolises help and protection.

GINKGO BILOBA
GINKGO BILOBA

It is nicknamed "the 40 écus tree" but not because of the characteristic appearance of its leaves. Instead, it is said to refer to the exorbitant amount it cost the French botany fan, M. de Pétigny, to bring it back to England, around 1770. All the same, its foliage turns magnificent colours in the autumn and it resembles thousands of pieces of gold, glittering in the setting sun. Native to China, it was discovered by westerners in Japan in the 1690s, then introduced to England in 1754. The naturalist Banks gave it room at the Jardin des Plantes in Montpellier in 1778. It had been named in 1771 by von Linné, based on the bilobate form of its leaves.

A truly ancient tree, dating from primitive times, i.e. 300 million years ago, it is known for its hardiness: it was one of the first species to begin growing again around Hiroshima after the atomic-bomb blast of 6 August 1945. On the other hand, a ginkgo in the English garden at Trianon was felled by lightning in 1960.

It is a dioecious species, meaning there are male and female versions. It was planted at Trianon in 1789 during the revolutionary takeover. Around 1820, sexual reproduction of the tree was attempted using a graft from a female tree from the botanic gardens in Montpellier. In 1847, 66 of the plants were recorded, most likely including this pair, planted around 1850.

POMEGRANATE
PUNICA GRANATUM

This tree is at least as lovely as its fruit. Its gnarled trunk seems to express the torments of an age-old being but is brightened up by its pretty, deep-red flowers. It comes from the high Iranian-Afghan plateau, where it is used to rocky, desert soil and is shielded from the heat by its leaves.

The Romans called it *malum granatum*, which means "apple with plentiful seeds", and the fruit gave its name to the southern Spanish city of Granada, where it was introduced during the 7th century. It charmed Louis XIV, who had it cultivated in boxes in Provence, as well as north of the Loire. Very few other places can rival the Orangery at Versailles for the number and maturity of the pomegranates it contains.

The red and seed-laden pomegranate fruit represents fertility. A promise of numerous offspring, its branches adorned the heads of married couples in Roman times. It is also a symbol of royalty, however, as its top resembles a small crown.

CUT-LEAF BEECH
FAGUS SYLVATICA
'ASPLENIFOLIA'

One feels very sheltered under the splendid crown of this tree, with its light and very fern-like leaves. These are slit into jagged fronds and are what create this cosy atmosphere. In the autumn, they turn magnificent shades of red and orange. Up to 1990, there was "the father" and "the son", the latter having been planted next to the former when the "father" first started showing signs of weakness, in 1960.

Its upright and broad stature, which is all the more impressive when it stands alone, makes this beech as ornamental a species as the oak. Cited in France since the 1800s, the cut-leaf beech was mentioned in the nurseries of Versailles/ Trianon in 1847, where 220 of the plants were cultivated.

The consistency and flexibility of its wood mean it is easy to work with and has many uses. It is used to make plywood, household utensils, tools, children's toys and musical instruments.

PURPLE COPPER BEECH
FAGUS SYLVATICA
F. ATROPURPUREA

How come it arrived in Switzerland, where it was flagged up for the first time in 1680, in Buch, in the canton of Zurich? The name of this village means "beech" in German and its legend is horrifically dramatic: five brothers are said to have fought each other to the death and their blood was splattered across the trees, the memory of which is retained in the colour of its leaves.

At Versailles, it deigned to grow alongside its counterparts, which is unusual. This tree tinged with royal dark red normally prefers solitude and will actively suppress other trees. Because of its height, the beech has also sometimes served as a landmark on high ground and as an observation post, in the north, during both World Wars.

WEEPING BEECH
FAGUS SYLVATICA
'TORTUOSA'

Very common in France, the name of the beech had to work in the local dialects, like this "fau de Verzy", which only grows near Reims. In fact, this particular variety only grows in highly localised areas, and nobody knows why, exactly. In the forest of Verzy, there are a thousand of these "weeping beeches", with their crazy convolutions, which sometimes see them being given evocative names, such as the lyre, the bull's head, the bride…

Had it been planted properly in the soil at Versailles, it would be a common beech. Instead, it was grafted on to another beech, demonstrating the botanical genius of the gardeners, who brought it here in the early 19th century.

This tree grows ten times faster than the common beech and has astonishing longevity, making it a symbol of passing time.

COMMON YEW
TAXUS BACCATA

Rooted in the rocks of Marie-Antoinette's Grotto, it was undoubtedly planted as it was being built, in 1780, as the Queen was establishing her picturesque garden. She often took refuge there, having assignations in this discreet recess with two entrances… Because it likes rock and quiet spots, the yew thrived there, eventually reaching a height of 3 metres, which is rare.

The long time it takes to grow, its dark evergreen leaves and colourful autumn berries means it is associated with eternity, the cousin of death. It haunts cemeteries like a symbol of the resurrection of the soul. It is easy to imagine its roots plunging down into the ground to retrieve it and take it to the top of the tree, from where birds lift it off into the sky. In the Middle Ages, it could be found on the tombs of the most eminent people. So, perched on this subterranean hiding place, wouldn't it have been a harbinger of doom? It was here, on 5 October 1789, that a page came to implore Marie-Antoinette to return to the King without delay, because the people were at the gates of the Palace!

But *taxus* can also be understood in the sense of order or placement. At Versailles, the yew clearly played a big part in the structuring of the Park. It is the source of many of the hedges that make up the strict framework of the French-style gardens, and of the topiaries that border the parterres and enliven them with their evocative shapes. In fact, its base will live twice as long if the outer branches are cut away, which explains why it is so easy to cut and form into multiple shapes.

CUT-LEAF CHESTNUT TREE
AESCULUS HIPPOCASTANUM 'LACINIATA'

This specimen does not look at all like what we'd expect, with its drooping demeanour and deeply cut leaves, which give it is "laciniate" designation. This is, in fact, an especially rare plant, which was around during the botanical activity that went on at Trianon at the turn of the century, from the 19th to the 20th.

The chestnut is perhaps the most common tree in France, recognisable by its straight-stemmed flowers that bloom all over it in spring, and its chestnuts that are spiky on the outside, smooth on the inside and beloved of children in the autumn. Its usually considerable bulk shelters park lawns and town squares, and it carpets the pavements in November with its indented leaves.

Ironically, the chestnut was, for a long time, a rather mysterious species. Up until the late 19th, it was thought to have originated in northern India, where botanists went to find it, without any joy. In fact, they found it a lot closer to home, in northern Greece and Albania.

The first seeds came to western Europe in 1576 via the Holy Roman Empire's ambassador to Constantinople, who sent them on to Vienna, where they were sown in the imperial gardens. The chestnut tree was brought to France in 1615 by the botanist Bachelier. A first specimen was planted in one of the courtyards of the Soubise hotel in Paris, and a second, in the city's Jardin des Plantes, in 1650.

"DOUBLE-HEADED" PALM
PHOENIX CANARIENSIS

Clearly, its originality lies in its two stipes – rare in the case of this tree, which originates from the Canary Islands, where it was identified by an English botanist at the beginning of the 19th century. The species was brought to France by Count Viguier in 1864 – much later than the date palm, which appeared on the Mediterranean coast from the beginning of the 17th century. It outshone the latter in terms of its robustness and its decorative charms: a larger, shorter trunk and highly fragrant, very bright green leaves, which made it sought after as an ornamental and border tree.

Its genus, *Phoenix*, comes from the name given by the Greeks to the date palm; it has nothing to do with the bird that rises from the flames but rather refers to Phoenicia, a major source of dates.

GRAPEFRUIT
CITRUS MAXIMA

According to the Orangery gardeners, this is the doyen of the boxed trees. This is mainly because of its size – it is 4 metres tall, despite the uncomfortable restrictions. The other grapefruit trees in the Orangery are far younger, although they produce equally nice fruit around Christmastime. As there aren't that many of them, in winter, they are placed in a circle around the statue of Louis XIV that holds pride of place in the centre of the Orangery.

The grapefruit tree originates from Malaysia and has been known in the Far East for its fruit for millennia. It was an English ship's captain who brought it over from Barbados in the late 17th century. The plant appeared in Jamaica in 1750, then followed the West Indies route before arriving in Florida in 1800, where it is still widely grown. In Europe, for a long time it was considered as a decorative species, featuring fruit with a thick rind and juicy texture. But it wasn't thought of as edible until around 1823, when it was crossed with a sweet orange.

CORSICAN PINE
PINUS NIGRA VAR. CORSICANA

Although it hails from the Isle of Beauty, this Mediterranean pine nevertheless thrives in the Parisian climate. Specimens planted in 1784 in the city's Jardin des Plantes by Bernard Jussieu are still around today. In 1786, the head of that garden, André Thouin, advised that the parks be copiously planted with them. He extolled their solidity and suppleness, which made them a popular choice for ship's masts.

Its life expectancy is much longer than that of other pines and it is also one of the biggest pines, able to reach 45 metres in height. In France, there are 24 different species, some of them very prevalent, such as the Scots pine and the maritime pine, and others that are associated with a particular biotope, such as the mountain pine and Swiss pine in upland areas, or the stone pine and Corsican pine close to the Mediterranean.

The specimen at Trianon is 25 metres tall and probably dates from when the English garden was restored under Napoleon I, when he gifted the Estate to his wife, Marie-Louise, in 1810. The one in the Queen's grove, also 25 metres tall, dates from Louis-Philippe's time.

MAPLE-LEAF PLANE TREE
PLATANUS X ACERIFOLIA
AND "ELEPHANT'S FOOT" PLANE TREE
PLATANUS X ACERIFOLIA

A familiar sight in towns and along roads in the south of France, this tree has been much admired throughout history. In classical times, particularly in Greece, it was used as a decorative tree. It has always been thought of as the tree of heroes and kings, and numerous legends are attached to it.

There is still some debate as to the origins of *Platanus X acerifolia*. Is it the result of a cross between the oriental plane tree – introduced to Gaul in the 3rd century B.C. and which resurfaced in the late 16th century – and the American plane tree, which was brought from America to England and then on to France by Buffon in the mid-18th century. What is certain is that the first examples of "maple-leaf" plane trees were planted in 1750 in the Trianon park on the order of Louis XV.

The one in the Queen's Hamlet dates from 1798 and is now 30 metres tall. In addition to its majestic stature it has a sizeable trunk measuring 7 metres in circumference, earning it the jaunty nickname "elephant's foot" plane tree. The one in the King's Garden arrived after the planting of this grove in 1818, when the Royal Isle was filled in, upon the order of Louis-Philippe whose arrival the tree likely witnessed.

GIANT SEQUOIA
SEQUOIADENDRON GIGANTEUM

Sequoias disappeared from Europe around 12,000 years ago and didn't resurface until the middle of the 19th century. The Gold Rush took Europeans as far as the Sierra Nevada, where they came across this huge conifer. Today, the "General Sherman" in California is considered to be the tallest known tree in the world, soaring to 84 metres and measuring 24 metres in circumference.

The first seeds appeared in England in 1853. The specimen close to Jussieu's Orangery is one of the first to have been planted in France, around 1870. At 38 metres tall with a trunk circumference of 7.4 metres, it is still young. It can live for more than 2,000 years and still has lots to see at Versailles, from its lofty crown.

The sequoia requires fire to reproduce. What happens is, the cones open up in extreme heat, releasing their seeds. So that it doesn't burn down, the bark of the tree is thick and fibrous an replete with water. Ironically, at Versailles, it is protected by several lightning rods situated close by.

JAPANESE PAGODA TREE
STYPHNOLOBIUM JAPONICUM
AND WEEPING JAPANESE PAGODA TREE
STYPHNOLOBIUM JAPONICUM 'PENDULA'

It's not actually from Japan at all, but China! It was given this name by von Linné in 1767, because of its prevalence in the Land of the Rising Sun. To avoid confusion, it's nickname – "pagoda tree" – can be used.

Nevertheless, it was from Peking that a Jesuit missionary, père d'Incarville, who, in 1747, sent Bernard de Jussieu the seeds from what was, at the time, an unknown tree, or *Arbor sinarum incognita*. The seeds were distributed in France, and then England, from where Antoine Richard brought back a specimen in 1764. Queen Marie-Antoinette had it planted close to Petit Trianon, next to the merry-go-round game that livened up her picturesque garden. What better way to shelter this Chinese-style carousel, with its pagoda-like sloping roof?

This 15-metre-high pagoda tree at Petit Trianon is one of the miracle survivors of the storm of 1999.

Those in Jussieu's Orangery are "weeping" varieties and were planted around 1920. Their drooping branches bow down naturally towards the ground, with no interference from the gardeners.

SMALL-LEAVED LIME
TILIA CORDATA

This is the most common tree species in France, where the lime feels right at home. Native to Europe, it is happy in all types of soil. Of all the deciduous trees in our temperate regions, it can reach the greatest heights.

Its excellent adaptability means it is widely used to line pathways in gardens. The earliest of them can be dated back to 1540 and Diane de Poitiers at the Château D'Anet. In 1767, Dezallier d'Argenville's gardens treaty confirmed it as one of the most common species along the walkways and in the groves. This was backed up by Du Breuil a century later.

The lime is often associated with femininity. Sweet nectars, infusions and honey can all be produced from their flowers, which, in the Middle Ages, were prescribed for nervous disorders. This is why limes are planted close to hospitals.

The origin of its name is controversial, but the Latin *tilia* gives us the word *telum*, which means "javelin". As it happens, the light and flexible wood of the lime was used to make Roman spears. It is also the wood used in traditional pianos to make the keys, which are then clad in ivory.

VIRGINA TULIP TREE
LIRIODENDRON TULIPIFERA

Quite simply, it is its tulip-shaped flower that gives this fact it hails from the eastern United States. In its native country, it can grow to 50 metres and it amazed the European naturalists with its majestic structure and very straight trunk that thins out naturally at the top.

It has been around in England since 1640, brought over by Charles I's gardener, John Tradescant II, and enthusiastically lauded by the writer John Evelyn in 1662. It was Admiral de la Galissonnière who, in 1732, first brought the seeds to France, to Trianon. They were probably the origin of the trees that have adorned the Queen's grove since it was created in 1775. These, too, consistently produced seeds, which were mentioned in 1788 by Abbot Nolin, director of the royal nurseries, in a message referring to harvesting them for cultivation. As for the tulip tree in the Spring garden, it dates from 1820 and so is almost 200 years old.

The tree grows relatively quickly, but only flowers after 25 or 30 years, bearing large, fragrant tulips of yellow, green and orange.

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Graphic design Des Signes, Paris – February 2020

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