

Potager Paradise

Photos by Eric Sander - Text by Victor Santoni

Stunning castles are remarkably common in the Loire Valley, but Château du Lude stands out, in no small part, thanks to its wonderful gardens. Lovingly kept by Barbara and Louis-Jean de Nicolay, this exceptional *potager* is ripe with seasonal goodness.



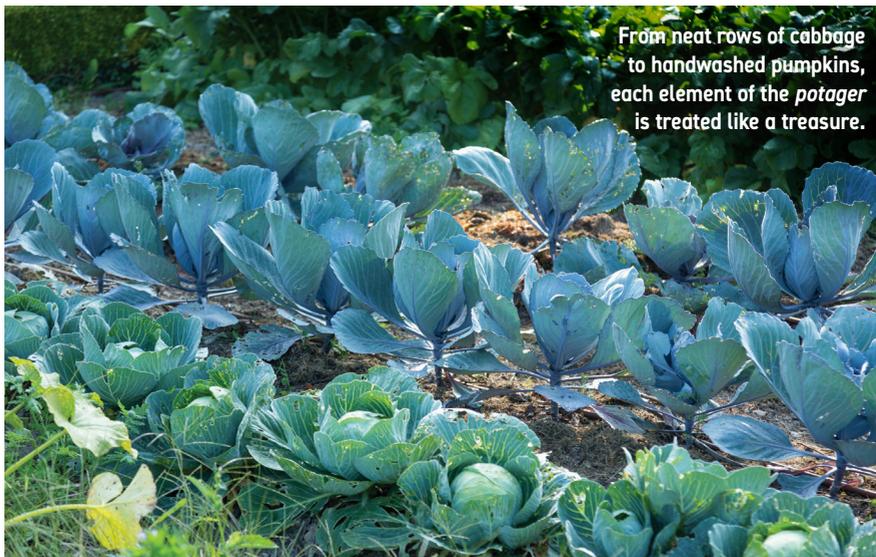
One of the oldest castles in the Loire, Château du Lude withstood the carnage of the Hundred Years' War and was gradually redesigned over the centuries by its successive owners. Today, it embodies centuries of architectural styles, culminating in an imposing form softened by its pale beige stones, typical of the area.

The grounds cover 18 acres and enjoy a layered effect thanks to the use of vast terraces built on top of and around some of the castle's old fortifications. The gardens within are bordered by ancient stone walls and filled with beautiful features, such as water bassins, rosariums and sculpted boxwood. The entire garden is run efficiently and consciously, with many initiatives deployed over the years to improve sustainability; for example, a number of beehives are maintained on the property, whose inhabitants pollinate the flowers and collect honey for the owners.



Many of the property's original buildings have been restored, like the orangery, which now serves as a tool shed. Some of the most dilapidated structures had to be sacrificed, but this also served to open up the garden's view onto the neighboring village of Saint-Vincent du Lude and its medieval church.

The castle's gardens are classified as *Jardin Remarquable* (Remarkable Garden) and are always open to the public. There is, however, a more private area — one that the de Nicolays consider their own treasured playground: *le potager*.



From neat rows of cabbage to handwashed pumpkins, each element of the *potager* is treated like a treasure.





EARTHY DELIGHTS

1. A member of the Lude team carefully transports freshly harvested produce through the *potager*.
2. Raspberries, ripe for the picking.
3. In the château kitchen, goods from the garden sit ready to be turned into delicious family meals.



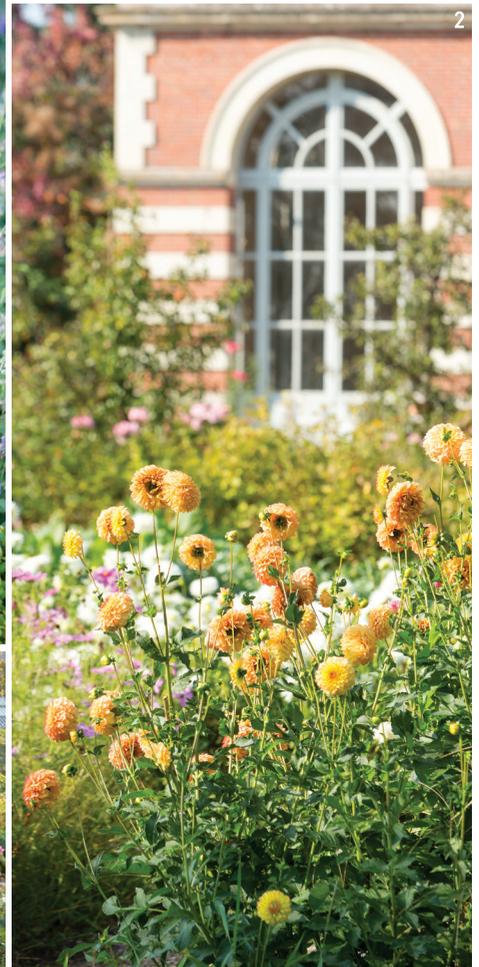
Created by Édouard André at the end of the 19th-century, this impressive vegetable patch still puts food on the family's table today. Located between the property's park and the old part of the neighboring village, it occupies five acres, spreads over three different terraces sectioned by elegant boxwood squares and boasts rare and ancient varieties of fruits, vegetables and herbs.

The de Nicolay family takes great pride in what they've maintained and built anew — generous hosts who believe in their responsibility as both keepers of the castle and sharers of patrimony. They dedicate much time to welcoming visitors into their ancient home, taking deep joy in seeing appreciation for all the treasures in their custody.



Barbara even founded the *Fête des Jardiniers*, during which the public is welcomed every June for a ceremony that recognizes the best French books on gardening and botany. She also organizes tours of the Potager and regularly opens up the castle's kitchen for lessons on traditional jam-making.

Despite its stoic structure, Château du Lude exudes a gentle soul that touches all of its visitors, none of whom depart without a renewed respect for its beauty of history. There is little doubt that the secret is the de Nicolay family, who, after 260 years, continues to infuse the castle with love and spirit. 🌿



TENDED WITH LOVE

1. The orchard trees, heavy with apples.
2. Peach and butter-colored dahlias are part of the garden's fall beauty.
3. Gentle waves of foliage surround the vegetable patch.