

Professional group Professional Group 'Healing Herbs, Aromatic Herbs and Cosmetic Plants'

on Excursion with the organisations Netzwerk Kräuter and Hortus officinarum

Andreashof

The excursions to Andreashof in Überlingen on Lake Constance and to Mainau Island took place on Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 June 2023. On the first day, the participants met in the light-flooded seminar room at the Andreashof, where the weekend started with the general meeting of Hortus Officinarum. Andreashof is a special place where people with particular backgrounds or impairments due to illness are also welcome to come and work. Various employment opportunities are available, in close cooperation with social institutions and projects. The Andreashof also hosts interesting lectures from time to time on the topics of health, anthroposophy, spirituality and much more.

Christine Freistetter (board member and master gardener) led a guided tour of parts of the company, which covers an area of about 10 hectares and employs around 30 people, including 6 trainees. Biodynamic cultivation has been practised on the entire area since 1998, which has a noticeable effect on the farm's biodiversity and is also supported by neighbouring fields, which have been cultivated biodynamically since the 1930s. These circumstances allow the farm to manage without buying in beneficials as far as possible, as these are already present in sufficient numbers and keep the main pests under control.



1 Perennial garden Andreashof

The farm's main activities are the cultivation and processing of various crops as well as the farm shop and café. In addition to various teas, natural cosmetics and herbal mixtures, a wide range of food supplements are also produced and sold.

During the tour, the participants were also able to look at the vegetable greenhouse, where tomatoes and peppers were currently being cultivated with the use of straw mulch. The nutrient supply for plants and soil is provided exclusively by compost produced in-house and by manure purchased externally since, apart from a group of sheep, the farm does not keep any animals. The sheep are currently an experiment and are intended to replace the mainly mechanised mowing or mulching of the orchards.

Chinese yam (*Dioscorea batata*)

A special highlight was the introduction to the Chinese yam (*Dioscorea batata*), which is a central and important crop on the farm. Yam was brought to Europe in 1840 and introduced as a potato substitute, as the native potatoes had been attacked by potato late blight and almost completely failed as a foodstuff. As the yam does not tolerate frost, it is not possible to grow outdoors in temperate zones due to winter frosts, so was never cultivated on a large scale in Europe.

As Dr. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the biodynamic method of agriculture and anthroposophic medicine, had already pointed out the special effect of yam on human health 100 years ago, its cultivation could be established on some farms working biodynamically, where it provides exciting products for nutrition and anthroposophic medicine.



2 Yam boxes

The yam requires a special cultivation method. In the past it was grown in boxes raised above the ground, both in the greenhouse and in the field. To meet the Standards of Demeter certification which requires direct contact with the earth, the cultivation became more complex and the quantity cultivated has been reduced from 6 t to 3.5 t per year. The cultivation of the yam takes about two years: the root is dug up in December of the first year and stored in a frost-free earth cellar over the winter. In the second year, the root is planted out again in boxes and finally harvested and processed the following December.

The yam grows impressive rhizomes of up to 2 metres in length and about 10 cm in diameter, with the root thickening towards the bottom.

The participants even had the opportunity to visit the farm's processing facilities. Different steps such as washing, slicing, and drying the yam at a precise temperature of 36 °C were demonstrated. The result was dried yam chips that are ground into powder in a specially adapted mill.

The tour ended with a tasting of yam tea and a presentation by Helena Melchior, an alternative medicine practitioner, who explained more about its history and uses. The multiple uses of the root in particular make it an interesting crop worldwide. It can be boiled, fried, baked or even processed into flour. In some African countries, for example, the yam is made into a porridge called "fufu", which is served as an accompaniment to various dishes. In other parts of the world, it is deep-fried to make chips or even eaten as a dessert.

Apart from its culinary use, yam also has medicinal significance: in the traditional medicine of various ethnic groups, it is often used to treat digestive disorders or inflammation and to strengthen the immune system. It also contains certain compounds that have antioxidant properties and thus can help protect cells from damage. The Andreashof management has made it its mission to expand the knowledge about the medicinal plant Lichtyam® through intensive research. The research and development department works in close cooperation with physicians and educational institutions to make the potential of Lichtyam® even more useful in the future. Empathic food testing studies can be found on the Andreashof website: <https://www.lichtyam.de/andreashof-besuchen/hofladen-cafe/>

Mainau Island

On Sunday, the participants met on Mainau Island for an expert guided tour. First, we went through the spring avenue. Walking in the light shade of the trees, awakened the desire for more botany. Past huge redwood trees, the tour continued to the adjacent rose garden. One of the most beautiful promenades of the island, it captivates with its exquisite scents and reveals its historical treasures. The rose collection, rightly praised by connoisseurs, includes more than 400 rose varieties.

The old roses are particularly valuable, including many wild forms that probably adorned the gardens of the Orient 3,000 years ago. The flowering starts from the beginning of May with a large number of wild roses, some of them very rare. In addition to the wild roses, there are also some of the latest varieties of rose hybrids that bloom more frequently and continuously. The peak blooming period in June was an unforgettable, sensorial, and informative experience for us.

We continued through the famous perennial garden with dark blue delphiniums, sunflowers (Helenium 'Rubinzweg'), candle knotweed (Bistorta amplexicaulis 'Blackfield') and globe thistles (Echinops banaticus 'Taplow Blue'). Prairie and steppe plants are skilfully combined with splendid perennials such as oriental poppies, peonies and daylilies. More than 20,000 plants in over 700 different varieties can be found here.



3 View of Lake Constance

Along winding paths, past flowering shrubs and bushes, the group then reached the 1400 square meter intensively planted roof garden of the Comturey restaurant below the castle. The plant focus of the roof garden includes the presentation of woody plants and perennials as well as classic garden hydrangeas. Over 50 different varieties of *Hydrangea macrophylla* with their ball-shaped flowers are arranged here with various companion perennials to form colour-coordinated planting combinations.

We then passed the Italian flower water staircase which connects the Mediterranean terraces and the lower shore area via a watercourse made of Calanca gneiss from Ticino. The cascade is modelled on the style of Italian Renaissance gardens and is accompanied by columnar yews. A varied alternating planting exudes southern flair. Adjacent to the water stairs, the Mainau

gardeners have created a peony garden where several shrub peonies have been combined with perennials.

Behind the imposing baroque castle, the next stop was the valuable arboretum. This park area invites you to stroll, linger and study.

The Mainau arboretum was established by Grand Duke Friedrich as far back as 1864. Little by little the Grand Duke, who was interested in plants, had foreign woody plants from almost all the continents planted on the high plateau of the island.

Today, the arboretum comprises nearly 250 species and varieties of woody plants, including: Mountain redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) and Coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), which arrived in Europe from California in the 19th century. Various species of cedar; mock cypress (*Chamaecyparis spec.*); arborvitae (*Thuja spec.*); magnolia (*Magnolia spec.*) and ornamental cherry (*Prunus spec.*) to name just a few of the most famous.



4 Mainau Arboretum (<https://www.mainau.de/de/attraktionen-detail/attraktion/arboretum.html?location=arboretum>)

In the restaurant Schwedenschenke we had a delicious lunch to conclude the excursion, and already began to plan the next one for 2024, which will probably take us to Switzerland.

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HORTUS OFFICINARUM
Verein für biologisch-dynamisches Saatgut von Heilpflanzen