

Dr Darwin's Medicine Chest (Bed 2 up the steps)

Erasmus Darwin's books and letters tell us that he recommended opium (often in alarming quantities), mercury and 'Peruvian Bark' (which contained quinine) for most of his patients alongside strong purging medicines and blood-letting.

In this part of the garden you will find some of the plants mentioned in his *Materia Medica* (medicine list): Poppies for opium, Foxgloves for heart conditions, Pennyroyal for calming stomachs, Valerian for sleep, Chamomile and White Bryony as emetics and Rhubarb (a great favourite for 'cleansing').

He also includes: Wormwood, Marjoram, Cardus Benedictus (Holy Thistle), Tansy, Parsley, Mint, Elecampane, Marsh Mallow, Liquorice, Hound's Tongue and Camphor.

The Dyer's Garden (Bed 3 above the wall opposite)

Large-scale synthetic dyes were yet to be developed in Darwin's lifetime and the plants here are examples of those which could have been used by professional dyers in the city to produce the natural colours needed for fabrics. They include Alkanet, Tansy, Dyer's Chamomile and Ladies' Bedstraw.

The Scented Garden (Bed 4 further along on the left)

Roses, Lavender, Rosemary, Chamomile, Pinks and Sweet Cecily are all favourite traditional plants which, in summer, combine to bring fragrance and colour to this historic house and garden.

*For further information see: www.erasmusdarwinhouse.org
Erasmus Darwin House, Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AD*



The Herb Garden



at

Erasmus Darwin House Lichfield

*There is no charge to visit the garden but
donations towards its upkeep are very welcome*

Erasmus Darwin moved to this house in Lichfield in 1758 with his first wife Polly. Medicine was his passion and he very quickly became a successful doctor, travelling far and wide to see his patients.

Among his many other talents was his extraordinary scientific insight into biology and he wrote groundbreaking books on the subject, translating Carl Linnaeus's *Classification of Plants* into English (*A System of Vegetables 1783/5, The Families of Plants 1787*) and finally into poetic form in the hugely popular two volumes of *The Botanic Garden (1789)*.

We know that Darwin cultivated a large garden of his own, although not at this site but rather on open ground at the edge of the city. Here he had space for an elaborate design with a variety of trees and plants as well as water features and he must have spent much time and effort developing this garden.

During the 18th century, qualified Doctors largely followed a regime of so called 'scientific' medicine, often abandoning the simple herbal remedies of previous centuries. However, apothecaries' shops in the city would still have provided a wide range of herbal tinctures, powders, pills and ointments, and the age-old plants they used are well represented here too.

The Museum and Herb Garden as we see them today were developed in 1999 from what was then the Cathedral organist's house as a £1.25 million project. An additional feature to notice is a relief sculpture of Erasmus Darwin and incised text on paving slabs leading through the garden which were specially created by the nationally renowned sculptor, Denis Parsons.

Mrs Darwin's Culinary Garden (beyond the entrance door)

The culinary garden reflects the extensive use of herbs and spices in Georgian cookery as well as round the house for cleaning, scenting, dyeing, disinfecting, and deterring unwelcome insects and animals.

In both beds there are selections of herbs for the kitchen which were used to enhance the flavour of food including thyme, mint, parsley, marjoram, sage, lovage and chives. There are also herbs for other domestic use – lavender and lemon verbena for potpourri and chamomile and lemon balm for herbal teas. Sweet Cecily took the acidity out of stewed fruits and Elecampane was useful for making cough sweets.

The Apothecary's Garden (Bed 1 along the right hand side)

Apothecaries in the 18th century were the equivalent of our high street chemists. They provided over-the-counter remedies for customers who wanted traditional products made from long-established herbal recipes, but they also made up prescriptions from doctors and these included more exotic ingredients as well as 'chemical' substances which were widely used.

Professional arguments about the relative merits of doctors' and apothecaries' training and skills were commonplace but without the apothecary's presence in every town, most people would not have had access to either the advice or remedies they needed.

In this part of the garden, you will find well known herbs such as Marigold, Borage and St. John's Wort as well as White Horehound, Soapwort, Bistort and Golden Rod.