

Sofiero

Sofiero came into existence in the 1860s when the then princess, Sophia of Nassau, who was married to the future King Oscar II, bought an area of land north of Helsingborg. She had a wooden villa built that was named Sofiero, after the owner. In 1874, the house was rebuilt in the form you see today.

In 1905, the then royal couple gave Sofiero to their grandson, Prince Gustav Adolf (later Gustav VI Adolf) in connection with his marriage to Margareta of Great Britain and Ireland.

When they took over the house it was in a state of some disrepair, as Oscar II had not shown any great interest or skill in the estate's maintenance. The princess, who was interested in gardening, saw the potential and set about planning improvements. In this way she created the basis for the park that is still being developed today. She wrote books on landscape gardening and was a good painter and photographer, who often chose her subjects from the park. She died in 1920, at the age of only 38.

After the death of the princess, Prince Gustav Adolf took over responsibility for the park. He devoted himself particularly to cultivating rhododendrons and created the most remarkable collection in the country. When Gustav VI Adolf died in 1973, he left the castle and park to Helsingborg Municipality, which has owned and managed Sofiero ever since.

The surroundings

Sofiero Castle and park have an exquisite location by the Öresund, 4 km north of Helsingborg. The beautiful flower park is surrounded by shady broad-leaf woods that enhance the beauty of the whole estate.

Rhododendrons

Rhododendrons belong to the family Ericaceae and there are considerable variations in size, growing behaviour and colour. Certain types grow up to tree-size, in rare cases over 10 metres. The most common form is a bush, maximum three metres high. There are also types that only reach a height of 10 cm.

The rhododendron family consists of around 1,300 wild varieties and many thousands of garden hybrids. There are both evergreen and deciduous types. The rhododendron originates from the Himalayas and is grown today virtually all over the world. In the wild, it is effectively only found in the northern hemisphere. They are dependent on shady growing conditions with high air humidity and a good water supply, but well-drained soil with a low-pH-value. Therefore, they never grow in dry regions. Most types are found in the very rainy areas of Asia such as the Himalayas, Burma, south-west Tibet, Yünnan and Sichuan, where they grow at altitudes of up to 5,000 metres.

The types grown in Europe before 1820 had flowers with pale colours, but then the first seeds of *Rhododendron arboreum* were imported to England from the Himalayas. They had a tendency towards a popular red flower colour, which sparked a dramatic spread of the species throughout Europe. Most modern hybrids grown today stem from *Rhododendron arboreum*.

In Sweden there is one wild type of rhododendron, *Rhododendron lapponicum*, which is hard to cultivate and rarely found.

The castle park at Sofiero has close to ideal conditions for growing rhododendrons. In the ravine, where they are most abundant, it is both sheltered and shady. The soil has a low pH-value and is porous with a good supply of running water.

In the park there are some 10,000 plants representing more than 300 different types or hybrids.