

## **THE ORANGERIES ( 5 E )**

The orangeries (conservatories) are particularly beautiful and are the oldest in the Low Countries, still used for their original purpose: protect the orange trees from the winter frost. In summer, the conservatories are open for more present-day functions : concerts, weddings, meetings or exhibitions.

### **Winter time**

Due to the warming climate, the trees do not winter as long as before. Instead of remaining in the orangeries from the end of September (the time of the village fair in Waulsort) to Ice Saints day (mid-May), nowadays they are moved inside the conservatories only at the first sign of frost and are transferred back into the gardens on May 1st.

During the winter, the soil and leaves are treated, if necessary, against parasites. The orange trees are watered just a little.

In the 19th century coke stoves were installed to maintain at least 8 degrees centigrade.

During World War II, the family gave up its ration of coal, so that the orangeries could be heated.

Today a simpler system is used: electric heaters are turned on and the shutters are closed when it gets too cold.

### **Repotting**

This is done either when the planter needs to be replaced or when the fertilizers and mineral salts no longer compensate for the poor quality of the soil.

In the first case, the tree is raised by a rope hanging from the orangery's ceiling and tied to the tree trunk. Then a 10 cm layer of soil is removed from the four sides. The tree is lowered into its new planter, whose base has been covered with broken bricks to ease draining after watering. Finally the 4 sides are filled up again with a mixture of arable earth, heather earth, compost from hedge cuttings, draining sand and gravel as a source of minerals.

In the second case the four sides are merely removed, then a 10 cm layer of soil is removed from the four sides and replaced by the aforementioned mixture.

Pictures depict the steps of this process.

### **Transport**

The pictures exhibit how the transportation of the trees changed over the centuries

Until World War II, the planters were pushed up on rolling wood cylinders onto a heavy 18th century wooden cart, the same way the Egyptians rolled up the stones onto the pyramids.

Since World War II, a lighter iron cart has been used: it is rotated under the tilted planters. Currently, the orange trees are lifted on a tractor-mounted pallet.

### **The planters**

The planters are exceptional. We resisted the temptation to use cast iron planters from the

Empire period, which are found everywhere because they last longer.

Our planters are still built according to the original technique and shape dating from the early 18th century: in wood strengthened with iron fittings.

The Region of Wallonia recently added semi-porous membranes to the lateral inner panels and replaced the wooden bases with metal grids. This should stop the wood from rotting and increase the planters' life expectancy.

### *Going to the next orangery*

You'll discover an alley of beech trees starting behind the orangeries, going north and ending on the slopes of the Meuse. At the end of the 18th century, there was a romantic garden in the middle of grottoes. From one of them, a water table fills the ponds by gravity via an underground canal.

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