



Our Favorite Public Gardens

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Country Gardens*® magazine, we showcase 20 of our all-time favorite public gardens.

By Marty Ross

STROLL ALONG THE PATHS at a public garden and you'll find inspiration in bloom. Botanic gardens, arboretums, former estates, and historic properties display the dazzling results of decades of collaboration among designers, plant collectors, gardeners, and nature herself. Like gardeners everywhere, the professionals at these gardens entertain grand plans. With the help of dedicated garden staffs and with resources backyard gardeners can only dream of, they work magical transformations in their landscapes. The best public gardens reflect the spirit of their particular place. Their scale might be grand, but there is no need to be intimidated: The ideas are tailor-made to fit in your own backyard. Take a camera, a notebook, and a gardening friend; visit the public gardens in your region, and put some faraway gardens on your list for field trips and vacations. Beautiful public gardens show off more than flowers: They provide vivid glimpses into the varied natural contexts of life in their locale. You can learn a lot in these beautiful places. Here are 20 of our favorites.



1. United States Botanic Garden
100 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20001
202/225-8333; usb.gov

Highlights: Welcome to your garden. The U.S. Botanic Garden, on the National Mall, right next to the Capitol and Reflecting Pool, was established in 1820. Today, the garden demonstrates the aesthetic, cultural, economic, and environmental importance of plants.
Country charm: The butterfly garden was designed to attract butterflies of all kinds, as well as other pollinators. No pesticides are used in the sunny garden, which is planted with native annual and perennial flowers, trees, and shrubs.
Ideas worth taking home: The garden is a partner—with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the American Society of Landscape Architects—in the SITES initiative, defining and encouraging sustainable garden design and maintenance. The Landscape for

Life program (landscapeforlife.org) encourages gardeners to work with nature for a healthy garden and environment.

Don't miss: The historic Conservatory, originally built in 1933, with its exhibits of orchids, rare and endangered plants, a tropical rainforest, and medicinal plants from around the world.

2. Chicago Botanic Garden
1000 Lake Cook Rd.
Glencoe, IL 60022
847/835-5440; chicagobotanic.org

Highlights: Fearless creativity meets you at the garden gate; Chicago's challenging climate could have limited the plant choices here, but the collection of hardy, hardworking plants is astonishing. Take a notebook and a camera.
Country charm: Sculptures nestle among the plantings throughout the garden. They are dramatic and impressive in these settings—and never outgrow their spaces.

Ideas worth taking home: American garden style—mixing native perennial plants with new discoveries—is at its best along the pathways through an area called Gardens of the Great Basin, the garden's central lake. Visit it in fall and it will take your breath away.
Don't miss: The English Walled Garden, designed by John Brookes. Classic design ideas are interpreted for the challenging Midwestern climate in this beautiful garden.

3. Atlanta Botanical Garden
1345 Piedmont Ave., NE
Atlanta, GA 30309
404/876-5859;
atlantabotanicalgarden.org

Highlights: Bird gardens, bog gardens, and habitat gardens emphasize environmental choices. Endangered native plants are nurtured in the garden's Conservation Greenhouse.
Country charm: Dazzling native deciduous azaleas, including

fragrant pink-flower Piedmont azaleas, almost steal the show from exotic hybrids. The garden also grows 160 cultivars of big-leaf hydrangeas.
Ideas worth taking home: Woodland gardens are cool; on hot summer days, the temperature in the Southern Seasons shade garden is 10 degrees cooler than the air temperature outside.
Don't miss: A walk in the treetops. A 12-foot-wide walkway takes visitors up 40 feet, into the urban forest canopy of oaks, hickories, and poplars in Storza Woods. Keep a sharp eye out: Several pairs of Red-Tailed Hawks live here.

4. Missouri Botanical Garden
4344 Shaw Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63110
314/577-5100; mobot.org

Highlights: The garden opened to the public in 1859; it is a National Historic Landmark and, like all good gardens, it grows more

beautiful every year. Camellias in the Linnean House, one of the oldest continually operating conservatories in the United States, bloom from late fall to early spring.
Country charm: A parterre planting of 1,000 boxwoods traces the initials of Henry Shaw, the garden's founder. The parterre is surrounded by an impressive, less formally displayed collection of excellent boxwood cultivars.
Ideas worth taking home: Stroll through the Kemper Center for Home Gardening and pluck ideas from 23 demonstration gardens. Follow your nose to the antique roses in the fragrance garden.
Don't miss: The spring bulb display is one of the best in the United States. Flashy tulips are here in abundance, but the daffodil collection is a showstopper.

5. Powell Gardens
1609 NW U.S. Hwy. 50
Kingsville, MO 64061
816/697-2600; powellgardens.org

Highlights: There's nothing quite like the 12-acre Heartland Harvest Garden, an ornamental, edible landscape. The design is inspired by classic quilt squares and carried out in fruits, vegetables, and companion plants. It is an ambitious and successful organic garden.
Country charm: Powell Gardens captures the spirit of the Midwest in its rolling landscape, exquisite prairie-style architecture, and impressive collection of native plants.
Ideas worth taking home: Limestone outcroppings are common in the Kansas City area. A dry-laid stone wall, densely planted with hardy succulents and tough, drought-tolerant plants, shows how much fun a rock garden can be.
Don't miss: For kids, there's a tutti-frutti maze of berries in the Heartland Harvest Garden. On hot summer days, the coolest place to be is in the refreshing Fountain Garden.

6. Longwood Gardens
1001 Longwood Rd.
Kennett Square, PA 19348
610/388-1000; longwoodgardens.org

Highlights: Large display gardens and an extensive collection of conservatory plants show off a seasoned staff's horticultural expertise. Clipped yews and boxwoods fill a fascinating, high-maintenance topiary garden.
Country charm: When Pierre DuPont bought this property and created Longwood Gardens, he did not have a grand plan. Cottage-garden flowers and roses were among his first plantings.
Ideas worth taking home: Lilacs line the path to the fountain garden. Follow your nose.
Don't miss: Water features at Longwood are simply spectacular; the garden has more fountains than any garden in the United States. On summer weekend evenings, 30-minute illuminated water shows set to music dazzle visitors.

7. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
4801 La Crosse Ave.
Austin, TX 78739
512/232-0100; wildflower.org

Highlights: Wildflower meadows explode with colorful blooms in spring and fall. Well-designed native-plant gardens with their roots deep in tradition demonstrate sustainable landscaping at its best.
Country charm: Rough local materials capture the spirit of the place. Native Texas limestone is a dramatic and natural element in these landscapes.
Ideas worth taking home: Wildflowers are colorful jewels, but they also are hardworking plants, supporting pollinators and providing habitat and seed for birds. The Wildflower Center is certified as a Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation.
Don't miss: There's a pretty garden around a seed silo, a