Our Favorite Public Gardens

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

By Marry Ross

1. United States Botanic Garden
   100 Maryland Ave., SW
   Washington, DC 20001
   202/225-8333, usbg.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 gardens 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. Nitrogen-fixing plants 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—on the SITES Initiative’s list of 50 gardens that can be used for educational purposes.

2. Chicago Botanic Garden
   1000 Lake Cook Rd.
   Glenview, IL 60025
   847/875-5440, chicagobotanic.org

   Highlights: Chicago’s botanic garden includes some of the most beautiful and diverse plant collections in the country. Visitors can enjoy stunning views of Lake Michigan as they stroll through the gardens.

   Country charm: The garden features a variety of plants, including rare and endangered species, making it a great place for nature lovers.

   Ideas worth taking home: Gardening tips and plant care guides are available at the garden’s information desk.

3. Atlanta Botanical Garden
   355 Piedmont Ave., NE
   Atlanta, GA 30308
   404/876-5500, atlantabotanicalgarden.org

   Highlights: Free admission to all residents of Metro Atlanta, and free admission for active-duty military on select dates.

   Country charm: The garden features a variety of plants, including rare and endangered species, making it a great place for nature lovers.

   Ideas worth taking home: Gardening tips and plant care guides are available at the garden’s information desk.

4. Missouri Botanical Garden
   5344 Shaw Blvd.
   St. Louis, MO 63110
   314/577-5100, mobot.org

   Highlights: Free admission on select dates for locals and visitors.

   Country charm: The garden features a variety of plants, including rare and endangered species, making it a great place for nature lovers.

   Ideas worth taking home: Gardening tips and plant care guides are available at the garden’s information desk.

5. Powell Gardens
   900 NW 63rd St.
   Kansas City, MO 64114
   816/757-2000, powellgardens.org

   Highlights: Free admission on select dates for locals and visitors.

   Country charm: The garden features a variety of plants, including rare and endangered species, making it a great place for nature lovers.

   Ideas worth taking home: Gardening tips and plant care guides are available at the garden’s information desk.

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

   Highlights: Free admission on select dates for locals and visitors.

   Country charm: The garden features a variety of plants, including rare and endangered species, making it a great place for nature lovers.

   Ideas worth taking home: Gardening tips and plant care guides are available at the garden’s information desk.

7. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
   4801 La Crosse Ave.
   Austin, TX 78745
   512/465-0101, wildflower.org

   Highlights: Free admission on select dates for locals and visitors.

   Country charm: The garden features a variety of plants, including rare and endangered species, making it a great place for nature lovers.

   Ideas worth taking home: Gardening tips and plant care guides are available at the garden’s information desk.

8. 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 the locale. You can learn a lot in these beautiful places. Here are 20 of our favorites.