

Rotary Botanical Gardens



Rotary Gardens is a botanical treasure in southern Wisconsin.

tions, as a BMX bike race area, and for storing items unwanted by the city. In 1989, Dr. Robert Yahr, a local orthodontist and Rotarian, proposed the area as the site for a botanical garden. Although local Rotary Clubs were instrumental in beginning the project, it is not affiliated with Rotary International. The gardens have been built almost entirely with private donations and volunteer labor with very little public money involved. The majority of the budget is funded through private donations from corporations, local businesses and individuals. The Friends of Rotary Gardens is a not-for-profit organization that supports the ongoing operations of the gardens. Hundreds of volunteers assist in everything from grounds maintenance to greeting visitors, guiding tours to preparing mailings. Rock Prairie Master Gardener Volunteers have been instrumental in developing and maintaining the gardens.

It used to be a “hidden treasure” but now Rotary Botanical Gardens in Janesville is becoming a destination garden in southern Wisconsin which is wonderful to visit in any season. This 20-acre site has been developed over the last two decades into an internationally renowned botanical garden. It has 18 different internationally-themed and specialty garden areas which originated from the international peace and friendship theme of Rotary International.

Rotary Botanical Gardens is a gift to the community from the community. The area where the gardens are today originally was a sand and gravel pit, which was later used for cattle auc-



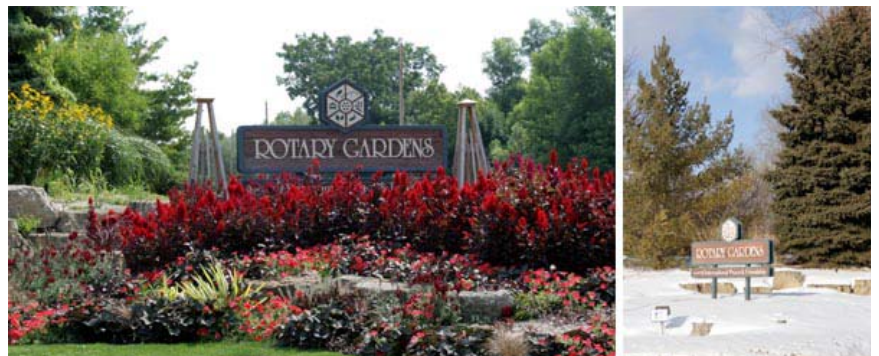
Looking over the English, Italian and French gardens.

Rotary Botanical Gardens has a lot of plants. There are over 1100 varieties of trees and shrubs, 2500 varieties of perennials, over 380,000 bulbs and over 100,000 seasonal plants installed each year. They have important permanent collections of daffodils (*Narcissus*), with over 300 varieties, ornamental onions (*Allium*, 54 varieties), and ferns (over 250 species and varieties). Other large collections include over 300 varieties each of *Hosta* and daylilies.

We begin our virtual tour at the parking lot by the Visitor’s Center. For a map of the gardens, see www.rotarygardens.org/images/2008%20map.pdf

Entrance Garden

Thematic seasonal color surrounds the Gardens’ sign out by the road, augmented by dwarf conifers and perennials.



The main sign on the road in front of the Parker Educational Center.

Parker Educational Center

Dedicated in 2003, this building houses the visitor center and gift shop, along with facilities for meetings and events, and the Rath Environmental Center with administrative offices. A terrace behind the Parker Education Center is used for visitors, outdoor events and other functions.



The Parker Educational Center is surrounded by colorful gardens, with a terrace in the back.

The color scheme in the area around the visitor center and parking lot is changed every year. Past themes have included blues and yellows; in 2007 it was bright reds and maroons. They enhanced the theme by painting some of the hardscape elements (PVC plastic pillars and obelisks) to coordinate and trailing plants were placed on the top of the pillars. The intention was to show how well bright colors, especially when used in a monochromatic scheme, can work in a landscape. In these arrangements foliage is very important for providing both color and texture. Flower architecture (the shape of the flower), not just bloom time and color, is also considered when creating these designs as this is especially important for creating visual interest when working with only one primary color. Some subtropical plants added in 2007 for their ornamental foliage included smokebush euphorbia (*Euphorbia cotinifolia*) and *Hibiscus acetosella* 'Haight Ashbury', with maroon leaves streaked with pink.



The 20-foot sculpture "Dialogue: World Peace through Friendship" by O.V. Shaffer at the garden entrance just to the east of the building signifies the Gardens' dedication to international peace and friendship. It is the largest sculpture in Janesville, weighing one ton.

The sculpture Dialogue: World Peace Through Friendship at the Gardens' entrance and seasonal plantings along the parking lot.

English Cottage Garden

Behind the Parker Educational Center is this diverse garden with a combination of bulbs, perennials, annuals and vegetables. The brick wall which surrounds this garden is typical of an English garden, where the wall separated the garden from an adjacent roadway or pasture or other area and emphasized the space's use as a garden. The plants are a combination of perennials and old fashioned



The English Cottage garden features perennials and old-fashioned annuals, surrounded by brick walls.

garden annuals, many of which are fragrant. Single hollyhocks, lilies, false dragonhead, or obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*) are some of the plants that would typically be found in an English cottage garden. There is a large old copper cheese vat – a tribute to the Wisconsin dairy industry – filled with tropicals, such as elephant ear, caladium and Brazilian fireworks (*Porphyrocoma* sp.) and annual impatiens and begonias.

Italian Garden

Continuing away from the building is this formal garden area with mirror-imaged plantings defined by boxwood hedges flanking a centrally located water feature. The plants within the hedges change annually.



The formal hedges of the Italian garden enclose different plants each year.

One portion of this area is defined as the Herb Garden. It is maintained by Janesville Area Herb Society, and is divided into culinary, medicinal, and ornamental sections.



The herb garden is maintained by volunteers from the Janesville Area Herb Society.

French Formal Garden

This sunny area overlooks the pond and fountain. The circular lawn is surrounded by beds that are filled with colorful and fragrant roses. A new rose collection was installed in 2007. Bailey Nurseries, one of the country's largest nursery wholesalers, provided support for the renovation of this garden, which is now a trial gardens for their rose introductions. Formal, sheared boxwoods and yews accent the curved, Pennsylvania bluestone walkway beneath the white pergola that delineates the northern edge of this garden. Colorful hanging baskets provide seasonal color and frame the fountain in the distance. Granite urns enhance the formality.



The white pergola of the French Garden.

Seasonal Display Area

Adjacent to the formal garden areas is an informal space with curving paved walkways through a shady area with shaped berms beneath large trees. A variety of unusual seasonal plants and bold tropicals fill this area in seasonal displays that change annually.



A seasonal display.

Japanese Garden

North of the seasonal displays is the first garden area constructed at Rotary Botanical Gardens. It is a traditional Japanese garden with statuary, a dry sea, waterfall and koi pond.

Fern and Moss Garden

This is one of the few such gardens in the Midwest, and with more than 250 varieties of ferns from around the world, is one of the most extensive in the United States. Plants are trialed here for the Hardy Fern Foundation (based in Washington state). The ferns are grouped by region of origin - Asiatic, North American, and European. Moss is an integral component of this area, with a collection of native Wisconsin mosses as a functional ground cover.



The fern and moss garden has an Oriental feel, with Japanese lanterns and other design features.

This new space was designed in a Japanese style, to be a contemplative area with rock work, lanterns, bridges and water features. The symbolic components are designed to represent the “hand of man” which is reflected in the highly shaped and layered plant material. Most of the time the primary color is green, accented with yellows and lots of different textures of the ferns, but there is seasonal color in spring and fall.

Hosta Hollow

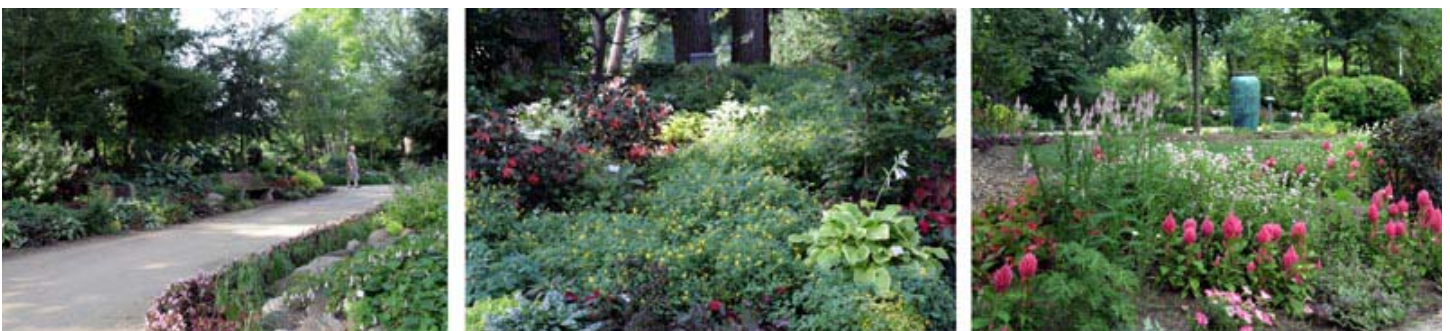
Beyond the moss and fern gardens, under large old trees, is a collection of classic hosta varieties including the Eunice Fisher Hosta Collection.

Alpine Garden

Behind the French Formal Garden on a gravelly slope is a small rock garden that transitions to the dwarf and miniature conifer collection. Because these durable plants here are short in stature, their subtle beauty is more appreciated from up close.



The alpine garden



The shade garden and adjacent areas.

Larch Area

On the opposite side of the walkway from the shade garden, deciduous conifers accent a space with lots of variable, seasonal color.

Sunken Garden

This rectangular space is designed in a formal English perennial garden style with a central lawn surrounded by a brick walkway, flower beds and a clipped hedge of Eastern arborvitae. Large cottonwood and honeylocust trees overhanging the space provide dappled shade. The peripheral planting beds, defined by a low lannon stone wall, are filled with bulbs, annuals and perennials. A fountain accents the east end of the garden and large containers provide seasonal color.



Color abounds in the Sunken Garden in every season.

Reception Garden

This formal garden is symmetrical and defined by a low lannon stone wall which is meant to be accessible by all. The primary features include some hardscaping elements that have a long history in Janesville. The archway that leads down to the Sunken Garden is from the old Parker Pen World headquarters. The 100-year old Druid sculpture was on the old House of Mercy (now Mercy Hospital in Janesville). The hedges are sheared Chinese juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* 'Fairview') and arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*). This area normally has a white, silver and blue color theme to create a feeling



The formal space of the Reception Garden is filled with plants in a white, silver and blue theme, while the hardscape elements relate to Janesville's history.

of coolness. The plants grown here are naturally tolerant of the reflected heat of the asphalt paved walkways in the area. Cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*), a relative of the artichoke, is a very architectural addition to this garden, with distinctive structure and texture and rugged looking silver leaves. Here it is underplanted with petunias and *Dichondra* 'Silver Falls' for a very cool effect. This trailing silver plant is used extensively in hanging baskets and as a ground cover.

Scottish Garden

Developed in partnership with the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, Scotland, this garden displays plant species native to Scotland with a focus on upland and lowland plants.

Color Rooms

This series of spaces is planted with sequential displays focusing on color themes: maroon, yellow, white and blue, with both flowers and foliage.

Demonstration Gardens

For the last several years, a different group of plants has been grown to show the diversity of the group, compare their growth in this climate, and inspire home gardeners to try these seasonal plants in their own plantings (as well as determine which are the best for incorporation into future planting schemes at the Gardens). In 2007, 155 varieties of salvia were grown, as well as 50 varieties each of tomato, eggplant, pepper and basil (in another area). In 2006 it was 90 varieties of *Nicotiana* (flowering tobacco); 115 varieties of Celosia and 220 types of snapdragon (*Antirrhinum*) were grown in 2005; and 154 varieties of zinnia in 2004. Demonstrations are planted in the “squiggles” as well as in beds along the main east-west walkway and in others near the Horticulture Center.



The Scottish garden.



Salvias were the focus in 2007 in the demonstration area; the plantings change annually.

All-America Selections Displays and Other Displays

In 2003, Rotary Botanical Gardens was approved as one of 175 display gardens in the country for All-American Selections (AAS). The following year Rotary Botanical Gardens won the prestigious AAS Display Garden Exemplary Education Award for their inventive educational historical garden display. Their garden, featuring 170 AAS Flower Winners available since 1933, was planted chronologically by date of introduction, so that a walk along the garden path was a stroll through AAS history. Two years later this historical garden was recreated with 200 varieties. Seven bermed AAS beds were planted based on plant height, tapering down from the tops of the berms to the edges to allow maximum visibility.

In 2005 Rotary Botanical Gardens became one of only six Fleuroselect Display Gardens in North America. These are award-winning annuals promoted throughout Europe. Rotary Botanical Gardens is also one of only three public gardens that are trial gardens for Ball Horticultural Seed Company, the largest garden seed supplier in the world. These trials allow the public and industry professionals to see these plants in person, including some not released yet. Rotary Botanical Gardens also has national display gardens for the American Hosta Society (in Hosta Hollow, see above) and American Hemerocallis (daylily) Society.



Display gardens, such as the Fleuroselect and All-America Selections, present award-winning annual flowers.

Along the edge of the large, central pond are several other features. The Observation Pier extending along the southern side of the pond provides beautiful views and an all-accessible fishing opportunity. The Japanese Foot Bridge, a traditional element of Japanese gardens, meanders out over the water in the southwest corner of the pond. The Japanese Bridge is a significant focal feature connecting the Japanese Garden to the North Woodland Walk. It was constructed from materials found on site.



The Japanese Foot Bridge across the central pond and the Observation Pier in winter.

Azalea and Rhododendron Collection

This long area along the southern edge of the pond has trials and displays of rhododendrons and azaleas suitable for southern Wisconsin. Perennials, bulbs and seasonal plants are also planted in this shoreline garden.

Woodland Walk

Following along the southeastern portion of the pond, this shaded garden contains a variety of plantings – both native and introduced – that thrive in woodland conditions.

Gazebo Garden

An ornate gazebo is the focal point of this area on the eastern edge of the pond under the shade of mature hackberry trees. There is a great view of the Japanese arched bridge across the pond. The beds



There are great views across the lake from the gazebo, which is surrounded by hardy perennials, including this toad lily.

surrounding the structure contain hardy perennials for textural impact and color in the shade. Asiatic wildflowers are a focus here.

North Woodland Path

This rustic trail connects the Gazebo Garden and the Japanese Garden around the northeast side of the pond. Colorful spring bulbs and showy woody plants accent this narrow space.

Arboretum

South of the Gazebo Garden and east of the demonstration gardens, this large space is filled with over 60 trees that are hardy in this climate.

Triangle Prairie

East of the arboretum, this triangular area between three roads showcases plants native to Wisconsin's tallgrass prairie community.

The outdoor gardens are open from dawn to dusk daily. Visitor center hours vary by season. There is no admission fee, but a \$5 donation per person is suggested. Guided tours can be arranged for a fee. The visitor center and the main garden paths are handicap accessible more aggressive marketing should help increase the profit margin for this sale in 2007.

Rotary Botanical Gardens is located at 1455 Palmer Drive, Janesville, WI 53545 and is easily accessible from Interstate 90, Wisconsin Exit 175A (just follow the signs).

– Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison



Rotary Botanical Gardens are a great place for all ages to explore!

Additional Information:

📍 Rotary Botanical Gardens – at www.rotarygardens.org/