

Cornell Botanic Gardens

by Alejandra Vansant



A student takes a break to admire the plants in one of Cornell Botanic Garden's themed areas situated on Cornell University's campus.

CORNELL BOTANIC GARDENS (CBG) in Ithaca, New York, sprawls across one of the nation's foremost research universities, allowing convenient access to students, faculty, and visitors alike. It comprises 35 acres of cultivated gardens, a 100-acre arboretum filled with magnificent specimen trees and shrubs, and miles of trails through numerous nature preserves. Together, these areas showcase the incredible natural beauty of the Finger Lakes region and contribute to its conservation. CBG, which welcomes more than 70,000 visitors a year, began to take shape about a decade after Cornell University's

founding in 1865. Even then, preserving and studying the area's natural beauty were key goals of its establishment. Numerous alumni and faculty, including famed botanist Liberty Hyde Bailey, who was a professor of horticulture and director of the College of Agriculture at the time, helped lay the foundations for what it is today.

As part of its recent sesquicentennial, CBG created a new strategic plan that builds upon this rich legacy to make a positive impact on the planet by cultivating plants, conserving nature, and educating people. "The role of this botanic garden is to raise awareness of the connection between biological diversity and

human cultural diversity," says Christopher Dunn, the garden's Elizabeth Newman Wilds Director.

DIVERSE GARDENS AND COLLECTIONS

The **Brian C. Nevin Welcome Center** serves as CBG's hub. From here, visitors can explore 12 different specialty gardens that surround the award-winning, sustainable building. For example, the **Robison York State Herb Garden** is home to 500 varieties of herbs curated to represent 17 themes, including Herbs of the Ancients, Edible Flowers, Medicinal Herbs, Herbs of Native Americans, and Economic Herbs. The **Groundcover Collection** comprises



The F.R. Newman Arboretum is a 100-acre expanse of majestic trees and pastoral landscapes.

areas for shade-tolerant plants, those that do well on slopes, and sun-loving species.

The adjacent **F.R. Newman Arboretum** also houses impressive collections, such as nearly 200 species and cultivars of maples (*Acer* spp.) and over 70 oak species, hybrids, and cultivars (*Quercus* spp.). Other species-specific collections include lilacs (*Syringa* spp.), dogwoods (*Cornus* spp.), and crabapples (*Malus* spp.). Several garden areas weave among the groves of trees, such as the **Zucker Shrub Collection**, which blends flowering shrubs that boast multi-seasonal interest with ornamental grasses and perennials, including a daylily display that peaks in midsummer.

Hiking the **Cascadilla Gorge** trail will provide a taste of the pristine natural areas in CBG's purview. The trail connects Cornell's campus with downtown Ithaca, traversing an elevation change of 400 feet while winding through woodlands, exposed bedrock formations, and creek habitats.

RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

Research is a fundamental aspect of CBG's work, and its cultivated and natural areas are equally important in tracking and explaining complex environmental issues. "For instance," Todd Bittner, CBG's director of natural areas, explains, "on climate change, we have been as-

Additional Information

Cornell Botanic Gardens,
124 Comstock Knoll Dr., Ithaca, NY
14850. (607) 255-2400.
www.cornellbotanicgardens.org.

- Hours: The Nevin Welcome Center and Garden Gift Shop are open Sunday through Thursday from 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m.–6 p.m.
- Gardens and natural areas are open every day of the week from sunrise to sunset, free of charge.
- Cornell Botanic Gardens participates in the American Horticultural Society's Reciprocal Admissions Program. AHS members showing a current membership card receive discounts in the gift shop and for select programs.

sessing plant phenology changes in our **Mundy Wildflower Garden** over the past 30 years to determine the magnitude of bloom change in response to climate."

The **Climate Change Demonstration Garden** vividly illustrates the effects future climate conditions may have on plants that are important to people and pollinators. Created in 2014, it features one set of raised beds open to ambient conditions, and another set that is enclosed in a high-ceiling tunnel that simulates temperatures as they are expected to be in 2050. Through this simulation, visitors can see that the food crops and pollinator plants exposed to rising temperatures suffer dramatically.

Other current projects include the development of mobile-enabled GPS maps outlining 240 miles of public hiking trails in the county surrounding the garden, and a Wildflower Explorations program designed to teach third-graders how to identify native wildflowers.

PLANTS AND PEOPLE

CBG seamlessly blends the cultivated and natural worlds into a dynamic experience for visitors of all ages. Through its various gardens, extensive collections, and scenic nature areas, it inspires an appreciation for plants that extends far beyond the Cornell campus.

Alejandra Vansant is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.



The Cascadilla Gorge features intriguing rock formations and flowing sheets of white water.