



RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS

Explore Sites That Participate in the AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program

Red Butte Garden

by Mary Yee



IN JUNE, flowering pineleaf penstemon (*Penstemon pinifolius*) forms dramatic swaths of red, contrasting with bright yellow sweeps of blooming buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum*) and creeping gold buttons (*Cotula* ‘Tiffendell Gold’), while the lavender blossoms of fleabane (*Erigeron speciosus*) and the pink ones of *Opuntia phaeacantha* ‘Peach’ create a gentle harmony.

This is what water conservation looks like at Red Butte Garden in Salt Lake City. Utah is one of the driest states in the country. The climate in Salt Lake City is characterized by hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters. “A lot of people don’t take water conservation to heart,”

says Marita Tewes Tyrolt, Red Butte Garden’s director of horticulture. “They think of it as cactus and gravel. That’s why we have the Water Conservation Garden—to combat the misconception.”

EASING INTO CONSERVATION

Located on the campus of the University of Utah and offering stunning views of the Wasatch Mountains, Red Butte encompasses about 100 acres, most of which are natural areas with miles of hiking trails. Twenty-one acres are developed gardens. Opened in 2017, the Water Conservation Garden covers three acres of sloping terrain and features 10 themed areas connected by wide, paved walking paths. Like all

the cultivated areas of Red Butte, it is irrigated as needed by a computer-managed system that factors in weather conditions.

The Water-Wise Mixed Border at the entrance to the garden aims for the exuberant feel of a traditional English perennial border using showy drought-tolerant plants such as lavender, rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*), blue oat grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*), and Greek yarrow (*Achillea ageratifolia*). “We want the Water Conservation Garden to be beautiful, to entice people, so that they will want to try some of the ideas at home,” says Tyrolt.

XERISCAPING IN ACTION

The core of the Water Conservation Gar-

With the Wasatch Mountains for a backdrop, pools of pineleaf penstemon (*Penstemon pinifolius* ‘Compactum’), bright gray partridge feather (*Tanacetum densum*), and yellow creeping gold buttons (*Cotula* ‘Tiffendell Gold’) put on a colorful summer display in the Water Conservation Garden.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF RED BUTTE GARDEN

den is the Water Saver Terrace. Here's where visitors can see how hydrozoning, one of the key concepts of xeriscaping, works. Xeriscape "refers to designs that incorporate low-water-use plants, and group plants together that have similar water requirements, or hydrozoning," Tyrolt explains. "Xeriscapes can still have a lawn and plantings that require more water, but the landscape is designed, planted, and irrigated within hydrozones."

The Terrace features five zones, each receiving varying amounts of supplemental moisture. Zone 4 looks like a typical home landscape, with plants familiar to most gardeners, but it is only watered three times a week. "We want to show visitors that the average landscape can still look good with this amount of supplemental watering," says Tyrolt. Other zones are watered once a week, once every two weeks, once a month, and not at all except during severe drought. "Plants in these hydrozones may not be as familiar,"



Munro's globemallow, top, and Apache plume, above, are drought-tolerant shrubs native to the West that produce enchanting flowers.

Additional Information

Red Butte Garden at the University of Utah

300 Wakara Way
Salt Lake City, UT 84108
<https://redbuttegarden.org>

- Hours: Open 7 days a week. Check website for current hours.
- Admission: Adults, \$14; seniors (65+) and military, \$12; children 3–17, \$7.
- RAP benefits: Free admission and free parking.

Tyrolt notes, "but show that well-designed landscapes can be densely planted, beautiful, and use less water." Some of these less-known plants include Munro's globemallow (*Sphaeralcea munroana*), a Western native subshrub that produces orange flowers in summer; Apache plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*), another native shrub with white spring-through-summer flowers that yield to delicate, threadlike, pink seedheads; and hummingbird trumpets (*Zauschneria* spp.), whose profusion of orange to red flowers attract their namesake pollinator from summer to fall.

ATYPICAL EDIBLES

You won't find water-guzzling tomatoes, corn, or many other traditional vegetables in the Desert Harvest Garden. What you will see in this section of the Water Conservation Garden, though, are asparagus, quince, persimmon, apple, and grape as well as Utah serviceberry (*Amelanchier utahensis*), buffalo gourd (*Cucurbita foetidissima*), wild crab apple (*Peraphyllum ramosissimum*), and Indian rice grass (*Stipa hymenoides*)—plants that are historically food sources for the indigenous peoples in the region.

The garden is designed with five different basins for passive water collection, in which rainfall or snowmelt is captured and directed downward. Extremely drought-tolerant plants like rosemary are planted at the top; fruit trees, which need the most water, are planted at the bottom.

OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

In addition to the Water Conservation Garden, Red Butte offers many other areas to engage visitor interest, including a Children's Garden, Floral Walk, and Fragrance

HOW THE RECIPROCAL ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (RAP) WORKS

This American Horticultural Society program is designed to encourage people to visit gardens, arboreta, and conservatories while traveling. As a current member, you receive free admission and/or other special discounts at more than 330 sites throughout North America! Here's how to make the most of this member benefit:

- View the current list of participating locations and the RAP benefits they offer at www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens.
- Contact the garden to confirm the RAP benefits it offers. (Some sites may choose to enforce a 90-mile exclusion policy; if your zip code falls within that distance from the location, you would not receive the offered RAP benefits there.) Admission to special events may also be excluded.
- Present your current membership card at the admissions counter or gift shop to receive the RAP benefit(s) offered by that garden. Each card will only admit the individual(s) listed on the card. In the case of a family, couple, or household membership card that does not list individual names, the garden must extend the benefit(s) to at least two members; it is at the garden's discretion to extend benefits to more than two individuals. Some gardens may require a photo ID.

Garden. The Four Seasons Garden is most spectacular in spring, when thousands of daffodils burst into bloom. In early summer, the Rose Garden is awash with color from over 900 flowering specimens. Popular herbs such as chamomile, peppermint, and St. John's wort are represented in the Medicinal Garden. Although these older gardens don't have conservation in their names, Tyrolt is quick to note, "We don't want to waste water anywhere."

So whether you're looking for ways to start conserving water in your garden or are seeking to improve an existing water-thrifty landscape, head on over to Red Butte Garden, where inspiration abounds.

Mary Yee is managing editor and art director of The American Gardener.