

## GARDEN DESTINATIONS

### Des Moines, Iowa

by Viveka Neveln

As the tourism tagline goes, “only the S’s are silent” in Des Moines. The capital city of Iowa has a roaring art, restaurant, and entertainment scene, but what you really don’t want to miss are the horticultural hot spots. From tiny hidden gems to the iconic dome of the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, vibrant garden venues bursting with beautiful plants abound. Whether you’re a native plant fan, into the rare and weird, ga-ga for roses, adore trees, or just love it all, here are the must-see plant-filled destinations in town, as well as a few within an hour’s drive away.

#### DIVERSE GARDENS DOWNTOWN

The 12-acre **Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden** is one of the crown jewels of horticultural experiences in Central Iowa. It offers both indoor and outdoor gardens to explore, comprised of native plants as well as those from all over the globe. The 80-foot-tall geodesic dome houses a conservatory for tropical and subtropical plants, including Iowa’s first *Titan arum* (*Amorphophallus titanum*), nicknamed Carrie. You can get a true taste of Iowa in this public garden’s new Founders Garden, which is designed to represent the plant communities of an Iowa sand prairie. And don’t miss the Gardeners Show House. In this repurposed greenhouse, you’ll find yourself immersed in a jungle of coleus, orchids, bromeliads, succulents, and many other fascinating plants.

Less than a mile south along the Des Moines River from the botanical garden sit the grandiose grounds of the **Dr. Norman E. Borlaug World Food Prize Hall of Laureates**. Designed by nationally known landscape architect Doug Hoerr, the formal gardens feature carefully clipped boxwood hedges and



If you’re looking for top gardening destinations in Des Moines, start with the **Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, top**, and the **World Food Prize Hall of Laureates, above**.

topiaries that frame lavish flower beds. They provide some spectacular photo ops with the Hall of Laureates in the background. This 19th-century Beaux Arts building has the distinction of being one of the few sites that is both on the National Register of Historic Places and

LEED Platinum certified. If your interest in plants encompasses agricultural innovation, taking a tour of the building is highly recommended.

About a five-minute drive to the west side of downtown will bring you to the **Better Homes & Gardens Test Garden**.



If you like your gardens with a side of art, don't miss the Pappajohn Sculpture Park, above. Get ideas for your home garden at the Better Homes & Gardens Test Garden, left.

## BEYOND THE CITY

Within an hour's drive from Des Moines, there are several more garden destinations that are well worth a visit. These include **Reiman Gardens** on the campus of Iowa State University in Ames, home of 15-foot-tall Elwood, the world's largest concrete garden gnome. The **Brenton Arboretum** in Dallas Center and the **Iowa Arboretum and Gardens** in Madrid are both Level III ArbNet Certified locations with vast and diverse plant collections. And **Newton Arboretum and Botanical Gardens** emphasizes ecological horticulture across its six acres.

—V.N.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden

[www.dmbotanicalgarden.com](http://www.dmbotanicalgarden.com).

### World Food Prize Hall of Laureates Museum & Garden

[www.halloflaureates.org](http://www.halloflaureates.org).

### Better Homes & Gardens

**Test Garden**, [www.bhg.com/testgarden](http://www.bhg.com/testgarden).

### Clare and Miles Mills Rose

**Garden**, [www.dsm.city/business\\_detail\\_T6\\_R60.php](http://www.dsm.city/business_detail_T6_R60.php).

### Master Gardeners'

**Demonstration Garden**

[www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/master-gardener-program](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/master-gardener-program).

### Iowa State Fair

[www.iowastatefair.org](http://www.iowastatefair.org).

This half-acre plot is packed with hundreds of trees, shrubs, perennials, vines, and more, all arranged to emulate a home garden setting. As you follow the circular path through the garden, themed areas showcase plants for shade, rock gardens, native gardens, water gardens, and more. Because this garden serves as an outdoor photo studio for *Better Homes & Gardens* staff, it's only open to the public on Fridays from noon to 2 p.m. May through September. If you've still got time left on your parking meter, take a jaunt across the street to the **Pappajohn Sculpture Park** to view its collection of 22 pieces by world renowned artists.

## AROUND GREATER DES MOINES

Continue heading west a few miles and you'll come to the **Clare and Miles Mills Rose Garden** in historic Green-

wood Park, behind the Des Moines Art Center. This 4.5-acre site is an official All-America Rose Selection Public Display Garden where more than 2,000 individual rose plants grow. Each of the 100 different varieties is clearly labeled and artfully displayed in beds bordering wide flagstone walkways.

The Polk County Master Gardener Program, run by Iowa State University, maintains three gardens in and around Des Moines for training participants and inspiring visitors. The **Discovery Garden** on the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines, the **Demonstration Garden** in Urbandale (a northern suburb), and the **Enabling Garden** in Altoona (nearby city about 5 miles away from Des Moines) are All-America Selections trial gardens as well, so each location practically overflows with color all season long.

Speaking of the **Iowa State Fair**, this annual event is world-famous for its butter cow and serving just about any food you can imagine on a stick. Its Agriculture Building filled with horticulture and floriculture competition entries is also a sight to see. So consider timing your Des Moines visit for August 10-20 to experience this event for yourself. ■

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