

GARDEN DESTINATIONS

A Gardener's Paradise in Seattle

by Erica Browne Grivas

It's no surprise that Seattle grows obsessive gardeners. Shielded from cold winds by the Olympic Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, Seattle (Zone 8b/9a) is blessed with typically mild temperatures and an ample budget of growing days, encouraging zone deniers to cultivate plants from places like New Zealand and Chile. Here are a few of Seattle's horticultural high points.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Each year the gardening season kicks off with the **Northwest Flower & Garden Festival** in Seattle's Convention Center (February 14-18 in 2024). One of the country's largest flower shows, it's packed with vibrant display gardens and a floral and antique marketplace with over 350 vendors. www.gardenshow.com

The next floral spectacle is the **Skagit Valley Tulip Festival** in April, about an hour's drive north of Seattle in Mount Vernon. Drive by a crayon box of growers' fields or buy tickets to one of six farms offering display gardens, dinner events, and more. <https://tulipfestival.org>

On the way home, swing by the delightful **Christianson's Nursery**. Peruse curated plants and goods in vintage greenhouses overlooking the mountains and valley. www.christiansonsnursery.com

From August through September, check out the Skagit Valley's dahlia fields and festivals, like **Dahlia Barn's** in North Bend. www.dahliabarn.com

GARDENS UNDER GLASS

When Seattle's trademark drizzle sets in from November to March, find refuge in glass-enclosed gardens. **Volunteer Park**, designed by Olmsted Brothers firm, is home to the **Volunteer Park Conservatory**, a 1912 glasshouse filled year-round with tropicals, cacti, and seasonal plants—and a large summer dahlia display outside. www.volunteerparkconservatory.org



This garden at the Center for Urban Horticulture features drought-tolerant perennials such as black-eyed Susans, blazing stars, and sea hollies on either side of a dry stream bed.

Downtown, three **Amazon Spheres** spanning half a city block are both offices for the shopping giant and botanical gardens. Inspired by biophilic design, the displays of 40,000 plants

from 50 countries include a plant wall rising four stories high. They are open to the public by reservation on the first and third Saturday of the month. www.seattlespheres.com



The perennial border just prior to spring bloom at Bellevue Botanical Garden.

ICONIC DESTINATIONS

The University of Washington (UW) has created horticultural treasures across three locations. At the **UW Arboretum**, exult in the trails and woodland collections, and don't miss the **Pacific Connections Garden**, a 10,000-plant world tour, and the **Japanese Garden**, especially in fall. Seasonal peaks include the **Joseph A. Witt Winter Garden** and the Japanese maple collection. <https://botanicgardens.uw.edu/washington-park-arboretum>

Across Lake Union, at the UW's **Center for Urban Horticulture (CUH)**, take in the charming **Soest Herbaceous Display Garden** helpfully labeled by microclimates, the **Elisabeth C. Miller Library** (15,000

designed by Fujitaro Kubota, fusing Japanese aesthetics with local flora. It's now a city park, where you can stroll through stone walkways, bridges and a necklace of ponds, amid a tapestry of choice conifers, deciduous trees, and shrubs, some hundreds of years old. A must-see in October. <https://kubotagarden.org>

About a 30-minute drive east across Lake Washington is **Bellevue Botanical Garden**. Its diverse offerings include rock, fuchsia, dahlia, waterwise, meadow, and native plant gardens and a **Ravine Walk** suspension bridge. It's best known for its 17,000-square-foot **Perennial Border**, a serpentine masterwork of color any time of year. <https://bellevuebotanical.org>

displays on children's gardens, cutting gardens, and sustainability. www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/p-patch-gardening/garden-list/picardo-farm

DAY TRIPPING TO BAINBRIDGE

No visit to Seattle would be complete without a ferry trip, and Bainbridge Island offers some of the Northwest's most memorable garden destinations.

Heronwood is a former rare plant nursery-turned-public garden owned by an indigenous tribe. Displaying 8,000 varieties in six gardens, it offers a view into the Port Gamble S'Klallam culture. Open weekends only, November through March. www.heronswoodgarden.org

Bloedel Reserve, a 140-acre former estate with 23 distinct landscapes designed by Thomas Church, Fujitaro Kubota, and others, includes Japanese gardens, a pollinator meadow, moss garden, reflecting pools and pond, and expansive woodland walks. [https://bloedelreserve.org](http://bloedelreserve.org)

Windcliff, open by appointment, is the home of plant explorer Dan Hinkley, showcasing 35 years of plant collecting on 6.5 acres facing Puget Sound, enhanced by sculpture and stonework, a potager, and a nursery. [https://danieljhinkley.com](http://danieljhinkley.com)

DRIVING SOUTH

Roughly 35 minutes south of Seattle, the 22-acre **Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden** in Federal Way grows one of the world's largest rhody collections, as well as Himalayan blue poppies (*Meconopsis betonicifolia*)—which bloom mid-April to June—camellias, Japanese maples, and a conservatory for color throughout the year. [https://rhodygarden.org](http://rhodygarden.org).

In Tacoma, about 40 minutes south of the airport, the animals at **Point Defiance Zoo** (www.pdza.org) live among a trove of rare plants from agaves to bamboos—well worth their own visit—while adjacent **Point Defiance Park** has extensive rose and dahlia trial gardens. www.metroparksTacoma.org/place/point-defiance-park.

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Although worth a visit in any season, Kubota Garden is especially inviting in autumn.

gardening books and 400 magazines), and the **Otis Douglas Hyde Herbarium**. Here you can see Darwin's moth, *Xanthopan morgani*, and its pollinator partner, the star orchid, *Angraecum sesquipedale*, that he predicted would later be found.

The UW's 2.5-acre **Medicinal Herb Garden**, just a short drive from the CUH on the UW campus, is one of the nation's largest public gardens dedicated to medicinal plants, growing a rotating selection of over 1,000 types. Seeds are available for purchase from an annual catalog.

Serene **Kubota Garden** is a South Seattle gem—a former nursery garden

EDIBLE GARDENS

Seattle's passion for farm-to-table food shows in its gardens, too. The **Beacon Food Forest** is a permaculture education and a pantry for a light lunch in Beacon Hill. Started in 2012, it was the country's first 24/7 free-forage garden, inspiring many around the world. Reserved gardens serve BIPOC communities as well as food banks. <https://beaconfoodforest.org>

Seattle's "P-Patches," or community gardens, get their name from the 2.4-acre **Picardo Farm** in North Seattle, the region's first. It boasts over 250 plots and