

## GARDEN DESTINATIONS

# Athens, Georgia

## A Journey Through Gardens, History and Innovation

by Connie Cottingham

Garden history is rich in Athens, where the first organized garden club in America met in 1891, and plans for the 32nd Piedmont Gardeners Annual Garden Tour in April 2025 are well in hand. Athens is also home to the University of Georgia (UGA), which offers strong programs in horticulture, forestry, and environmental design, plus the world's first standalone school of ecology. The UGA Cooperative Extension, UGA Trial Garden, and the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, plus local celebrity experts such as Allan Armitage, Kim Coder, and Mike Dirr, have also brought attention and respect to Athens.

In addition to horticulture, the city has a vibrant food, music, and arts scene. And don't forget about sports. UGA's football team, the Bulldogs, is a college powerhouse. When you're planning your visit, just be aware there are a few weekends each fall when football is *everything*.

### DOWNTOWN

Two downtown gardens complement historic homes. Starting a visit in the local welcome center is always a good idea. The **Historic Athens Welcome Center** includes the 1820s Federal-style **Church-Waddel-Brumby House Museum** with gardens maintained by the Piedmont Gardeners.

The **Ware-Lyndon Historic House Museum**, north of downtown, is now attached to the Lyndon House Arts Center. A parterre garden with infor-

mative signage sits beside the 1850s home.

### UGA MAIN CAMPUS

The oldest part of the UGA campus and downtown Athens come together on Broad Street. A doable walk from downtown's many restaurants and hotels can take you through the most historic part of campus to the **Founders Memorial Garden**, which celebrates the 12 found-



Ware-Lyndon Historic House Museum

ers of the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, the first—and still active—organized garden club in America. The 2½-acre landscape includes two courtyards and a formal boxwood garden.

The entire 600+ acre **UGA Campus** is an arboretum established 25 years ago. Check out its online walking tour of trees. UGA's free bus system can connect you to campus gardens.

The **Trial Gardens at UGA** are where well-labeled perennials, annuals, and roses are tested and judged (with both UGA criteria and popularity votes). Results are available online, a key resource for those gardening in hot, humid summers. You are welcome to walk in anytime, but



The Trial Gardens at UGA

scheduling to attend plant sales and tours is worth it.

The **Latin American Ethnobotanical Garden** is managed by the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute. It includes culturally significant plants through-

out Central and South America and the Caribbean. Informative signs about familiar and unfamiliar plants add to a personal visit. ([lacs.uga.edu](http://lacs.uga.edu))

A mile south of main campus, the **State Botanical Garden of Georgia** at UGA is on 323 acres bordering the Middle Oconee River. Experience a conservatory of tropical plants, the **Porcelain and Decorative Arts Museum** connecting nature and art, and over 5 miles of trails, including an ADA-compliant trail and boardwalk leading through tall trees to the river's edge.

Numerous themed gardens include the Herb Garden, Flower Garden and Shade Gardens. The Heritage Garden



State Botanical Garden of Georgia

celebrates the agriculture and horticultural history of Georgia with heirloom plants. The International Garden walks you through culture, history, and plant exploration around the world. The **Alice H. Richards Children's Garden** features interactive exhibits and signage

that engage adults as well as children. ([botgarden.uga.edu](http://botgarden.uga.edu))

#### **ACC EXTENSION DEMONSTRATION GARDEN**

Maintained by the Athens Area Master Gardeners, the **Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Extension Demonstration Garden** is filled with ornamental plants, food crops, garden décor, and whimsy just west of Athens in Bogart.

#### **THE PIEDMONT GARDENERS ANNUAL GARDEN TOUR**

The Piedmont Gardeners Annual Garden Tour of 5 to 6 mainly private gardens in the Athens area is an April tradition worth scheduling your trip to include. The 2025 tour will take place on April 19; reserve your tickets early. ([piedmontgardeners.org](http://piedmontgardeners.org))

#### **NURSERIES WORTH VISITING**

If you're looking for specialty plants, the Athens area has plenty of destination

nurseries, including **Cofer's Home & Garden Showplace**, family owned for over 100 years. ([cofers.com](http://cofers.com))

Open by appointment, **Garden Design Nursery** in Danielsville offers Japanese maples, ginkgos, and conifers. ([gardendesignnursery.com](http://gardendesignnursery.com))

**Piccadilly Farm Nursery and Gardens** in Bishop holds Garden Fair Open Houses in March and is also open by appointment to show off its impressive display gardens featuring conifers, hellebores, and other ornamental perennials. ([piccadillyfarm.com](http://piccadillyfarm.com))

**Simonton Bridge Daylily Farm** in Watkinsville is a certified American Daylily Society Display Garden that sells daylily plants and is open to visitors during bloom season, which peaks in early June. ([simontonbridgedaylilies.com](http://simontonbridgedaylilies.com)) ■

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