

## GARDEN DESTINATIONS

### Botanical Gardens and Desert Horticulture Are a Safe Bet

by Claire Splan



Ethel M Cactus Garden



Bellagio Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

**Botanical Gardens.** The 14,000-square-foot seasonal display gardens in the Bellagio Hotel & Casino change five times a year, reflecting spring, summer, harvest, holiday, and Lunar New Year themes. The displays are big, colorful, family-friendly, and splashy. The horticulture and engineering teams that create the garden exhibits take pains to keep it as sustainable as possible by replanting and repurposing the living plant material. Admission is free and wheelchair accessible. ([mgmresorts.com](http://mgmresorts.com))

The **Clark County Botanical Garden** surrounds the University of Nevada Reno Extension office with 7 acres of plant collections that are open to the public Mondays through Fridays for self-guided or Master Gardener docent-guided tours. More than 4,500 plants used in water-smart designs populate the Pine Grove, Cactus Garden, Courtyard Gardens, Dry Wash, and Front Gardens. Check the calendar on the Extension website to find a variety of horticultural events in and around Las Vegas. ([extension.unr.edu](http://extension.unr.edu))

What do you do when you find yourself in the casino capital of the country, but the only thing you ever gamble on is plants? You may think Las Vegas is all about bright lights and high rollers, but there are definite highlights for plant people—you just have to know where to look.

Unless you're from the Southwest, the botanical offerings of the Las Vegas area may seem exotic. Despite the region's efforts to bring people—and water—to what has been fashioned into a neon oasis,

this is still desert country. In public landscapes aloes and agaves abound, along with salvias, Joshua trees, palms, and yuccas. The stark red rock of the surrounding mountains is a constant reminder that the area tends to be dry about 320 days of the year, averaging only slightly more than 4 inches of annual rainfall. Even so, there are garden delights to enjoy, as I found out last autumn.

You can start the horticultural tour right on the Las Vegas Strip with a visit to the **Bellagio Conservatory and**



Desert landscape surrounding Las Vegas

The whole family will enjoy a visit to the **Springs Preserve Botanical Garden** (a member of the AHS Garden Network). Named one of the “Top 10 North American Gardens Worth Traveling For” at the Garden Tourism Awards, it features 8 acres of Mojave Desert and desert-adapted plants and special collections such as a rose garden, vegetable and herb gardens, and more. Stroll through more than 3 miles of nature trails or hop on a short, narrated trackless train ride to learn a little local history. Kids will enjoy the butterfly habitat, playground, and splash pad. The Springs Preserve also includes a café as well as the **Nevada State Museum**, making it easy to spend the better part of a day there. ([springspreserve.org](http://springspreserve.org))

Another garden I was glad I visited is the **Las Vegas Community Healing Garden**, a memorial garden created

in just four days following the mass shooting that killed 58 people and injured 500 more who were attending the Route 91 Harvest music festival on October 1, 2017. Filled with deeply moving and personal individual memorials, the garden includes a wall of remembrance that lists the names of the victims and a heart-shaped planter lined with tiles made by victims’ families, survivors, and community members. ([lasvegasnevada.gov](http://lasvegasnevada.gov))

For a sweet conclusion to your Las Vegas garden tour, stop by the **Ethel M Chocolate Factory and Cactus Garden**. View the factory’s inner workings, purchase some chocolate in the store, then head outside to wander through the 3-acre garden containing more than 300 species of mostly Southwestern native cacti and other desert plants. From No-

vember until early January, the cactus garden blooms with spectacular holiday lights and décor. ([ethelm.com](http://ethelm.com)) ■

*Claire Splan is associate editor of The American Gardener. She lives in Northern California.*

### PLANT SOUVENIRS

Want to bring a little desert horticulture home with you? Las Vegas has several fun nurseries worth checking out.

Downtown, the **LV Plant Collective** ([lvplantcollective.com](http://lvplantcollective.com)) features houseplants and curated plant-related gifts and décor.

**Mojave Bloom** ([mojavebloomnv.com](http://mojavebloomnv.com)), also downtown, offers indoor and outdoor plants and garden supplies.

For the most complete botanical shopping experience, **Cactus Joe’s Desert Garden & Nursery** ([cactusjoeslv.com](http://cactusjoeslv.com)) has more than 7 acres of desert plants as well as petrified wood, saguaro and cholla skeletons, and other landscaping items.

! For comfort and safety, plan your visits to outdoor gardens ● early in the day. Wear a hat and bring a water bottle—Las Vegas heat can be fierce. Some sites may close during periods of extreme heat.



Las Vegas Community Healing Garden