

RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS

Explore Sites That Participate in the AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program

Bellevue Botanical Garden

by Rachel de Rosset

WHEN IT comes to public gardens, the greater Seattle metropolitan area offers a wealth of choices, including Bellevue Botanical Garden (BBG), an urban refuge in the region's third-largest city. This 53-acre gem has delighted the visiting public and the Bellevue community for 27 years, since its opening in 1992. With woodlands, wetlands, plant displays, design exhibitions, educational programs, and more, BBG has something for everyone.

The garden itself is a testament to the community spirit in Bellevue. In 1981, Harriet and Cal Shorts deeded their home and extensive garden to the City of Bellevue with the understanding that once they no longer resided in the home, their property would be converted into a public space.

Soon after, in 1984, locals Iris and Bob Jewett decided that the Bellevue community would benefit greatly from free access to a botanic garden. They founded the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society (BBGS) and reached out to the city for support. The city in turn approached the Shorts about establishing a botanical garden on their property. With the Shorts' blessing, volunteers immediately began planning the garden.

Over time, the garden established relationships with 10 local partner organizations, which assist with maintenance and all areas of garden operation. The BBGS, however, remains the garden's primary partner, "raising funds to support the Garden's physical growth and development and providing a broad range of events and horticultural education programs for children

and adults," says BBGS Communications Manager Darcy McInnis.

Since opening, the garden has transformed into a world-renowned horticultural center, complete with a new state-of-the-art visitor center and year-round public events and programs.

ENCOURAGING VISITATION

While serving the surrounding community is the garden's primary mission, Bellevue also welcomes an average of 350,000 visitors per year. The numerous small garden areas, trails, and ever-changing displays that fill the garden mean there's no shortage of things to see, but crowd favorites include the acclaimed **Northwest Perennial Alliance Perennial Border**—resplendent in year-round color from a carefully orches-



The award-winning Northwest Perennial Alliance Border is one of the largest volunteer-maintained public perennial gardens in the United States.



Once a soggy lawn, the new 13,000-square-foot Urban Meadow is a colorful, water-thrifty, cultivated landscape that both delights visitors and creates valuable habitat for wildlife.

trated blend of perennials, bulbs, shrubs, evergreens, and trees that thrive in northwestern gardens—and the newly built **Urban Meadow**—designed to conserve water and attract pollinators—as particular crowd favorites. The beautiful **Tateuchi Loop Trail** leads to these areas and all the other core gardens at BBG, including the **Tateuchi Pavilion** and the **Shorts House**.



The Tateuchi Pavilion is one of 11 stops along the half-mile Tateuchi Loop Trail.

In addition to focusing on contemporary gardening and environmental issues, the garden is upgrading technology to make the gardens more accessible. Among the innovations are interactive plant bed markers, which visitors “can tap or scan with their mobile devices to get the complete list of plants, with photos and at-

tributes, for the bed they are looking at,” says Garden Manager Nancy Kartes.

The BBG also hosts an annual lecture series. This year’s series, sponsored by the American Horticultural Society, included speakers on topics from native plants to mindfulness in the garden. In this season’s final lecture, slated for October 16, professional gardener and writer Daniel Mount will present “Spring Starts in October.”

SEASONAL CROWD PLEASERS

A diverse schedule of events includes offerings in every season. With the arrival of fall, visitors begin anticipating one of the garden’s most popular events, **Garden d’Lights**, which runs this year from November 30 through December 31. “Each year, 80,000 people visit Garden d’Lights to see over half a million sparkling lights formed into the shapes of plants, flowers, birds, animals, and cascading waterfalls,” says McInnis. At the end of summer, Bellevue hosts its second most popular event, **Arts in the Garden**, which spans a weekend and features artists, live music, and food from local venues.

Kartes views the success of these events as a byproduct of the intimate collaboration between garden and community that began with the garden’s founding. As Kartes puts it, Bellevue Botanical Garden is a refuge for “those who seek respite from a hectic world.”

Rachel de Rosset is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.

Additional Information

Bellevue Botanical Garden

12001 Main Street
Bellevue, WA 98005
(425) 452-2750
<https://bellevuebotanical.org>

- Hours: Open daily dawn to dusk
- Admission: Free
- RAP benefits: Free admission, free parking, library privileges.

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 320 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. This list is also published in a booklet. To order, visit <https://www.ahsgardening.org/gardening-programs/rap>.
- 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.