

Plant Destinations

There is no shortage of hallowed places and consummate experiences for plant geeks. Each of us has our favorites. Included here is my select list of the wonders of the plant world (my wonders of the Garden world is a much larger listing). More information is easily available on the WWW.

Let me know ([planted \[at\] huntington.org](mailto:planted@huntington.org)) which experiences, sites, and specimens you would like to see included in this listing.



Harvard's Glass Flowers

If there is any man-made wonder in the botanical world, it must be this remarkable collection of full-scale glass plants (mostly plants that would have been useful for botany lectures). Located in the Natural History Museum on the Harvard Campus, these 4,400 glass models (representing 780 species) are, today, artifacts of traditional natural history didactics. Financed through support from Mary Lee and Elizabeth Ware, Professor G. L. Goodale commissioned creation of the flowers as illustrations for plant science students, though he certainly understood that the father-son team, Rudolf and Leopold Blaschka, were also creating a treasure for the ages. The glass flowers constitute a unique and powerful statement about the love of plants and flowers. Anyone who shares that love should visit this collection.

The Great Tree of Tule

South of Oaxaca, *en route* to Monte Albán, travelers pass the great tree of Tule.... Most people stop, at least once. For plant students, Oaxaca (with its ethnobotanical garden) and this tree provide every reason imaginable to visit southern Mexico. The tree itself is a massive example (with several trunks grown together) of the Moctezuma cypress, *Taxodium mucronatum*. Nicknamed the Tree of Life, this specimen is unforgettable.

The Giant Redwoods

Every plant lover should make at least one pilgrimage to the Giant redwoods, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*. Landlocked on slopes of the mountains surrounding Yosemite Valley, these trees have endured

through many epochs; individual specimens can be over 3,000 years old. Sadly, climate change, with increasing drought and other ecological and potential disease threaten these long-extant visitors from the past. Go to see them, and encourage officials to fund any process that would mitigate issues threatening their future survival. Where else, according to John Muir “are such columns of sunshine, tangible, accessible, terrestrialized?”

The Coastal Redwoods

There is something ancient and otherworldly about forests of the Pacific Northwest. Not only will you find the unbelievable Giant Redwoods on the slopes of the Sierras, but a trip to the Pacific coast immerses visitors in entire forests of many kinds of giant and majestic trees, including Douglas fir, pines, and cedar. The emperors of these royal courts, clinging to their habitat in the coastal fog belt, are the Coast Redwoods, famed for including the tallest trees ever measured. A walk through the awe-inspiring groves of *Sequoia sempervirens* will cure what ails you.

Okefenokee

People are likely repelled by the word swamp. Bog doesn't make a good impression either. But your mindset would be altered by a day trip through the remarkable Okefenokee Swamp in southeast Georgia. Freshwater, hemmed in by natural topography, supports massive near-floating islands of peat, crowned with their own forests and wildlife. These boggy ecosystems create an otherworldly experience that alters the sense of normal.

Saguaro National Forest

I seldom use the word quintessential - because the meaning denies routine use. For the quintessential desert plant experience, defying the reality of relentless open space that characterizes most deserts..., for an immersion that fulfills your greatest cactus desires and delivers iconic desert to your heart's content, hardly any vistas satisfy like Saguaro National Park, embracing Tucson on both the east and west. Visits to park headquarters and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum are crucial components of the experience.



Longwood Gardens

To recalibrate your standards of horticultural perfection, nothing is more bracing than a day spent in the gardens and glasshouses of Longwood, just outside Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Particularly spectacular times to visit include autumn, when the chrysanthemum displays are at their peak, and spring, when tulip and other bulb displays reach their apotheosis (a word borrowed from my art friends).

The Los Angeles Flower Mart

I am certain other large cities have huge flower marts, so if the one you know is better, then just substitute the name. For my part, the LA

Flower Mart is top notch. I usually go downtown, to arrive at the Mart by about 5:30 AM. It is still bustling, and most of the stalls are yet open and active. The general public is allowed to enter later in the morning, but with a wholesale license and membership in the Mart, you can prowl the aisles early. It is still wondrous, though most people suspect that flower exchanges like this are doomed - high quality silk and plastic flowers, increasing sales of imported plants (like *Phalaenopsis*), and trends away from lavish floral arrangements have changed the formula. But this is still a great and immersive experience. Find your way in....



Contrary thoughts....

"I never cross a flower market without being seized by a bitter sadness. It seems to me that I am in a bazaar of slaves at Constantinople or Cairo. The slaves are the flowers.

Look at the rich who come to buy them; they look at them, touch them, consider whether they are sufficiently youthful, healthy, and beautiful. The purchase is concluded. Follow your master, poor flower, serve his pleasures, decorate his se-

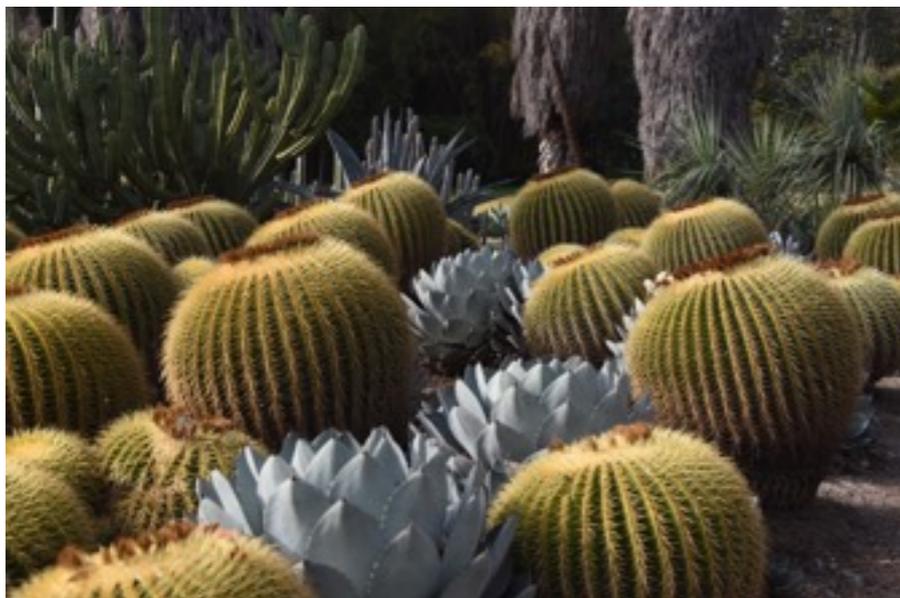
raglio, you will have a beautiful porcelain dress, a pretty cloak of moss and you will live in a sumptuous apartment; but farewell to sun, breeze and liberty: you are enslaved.”

from J. J. Grandville, 1847, *Les Fleurs animees*. Translation from T. M. Kelly, 2012, *Clandestine Marriage - Botany & Romantic Culture*.

Huntington Botanical Gardens

There are, of course, many wonderful public gardens in North America, and even several right here in Los Angeles County....., but I want to take a moment to recommend you visit the Garden I direct, which goes by many names. Tucked in the north edge of San Marino, CA, we call ourselves The Huntington, while in documents of origin, we are The Henry E Huntington Library and Art Gallery, a “library, art gallery, and botanical garden.” William Hertrich, the founding Curator called this enterprise Huntington Botanical Gardens, because somewhere along the route people felt there was too much variety to be singular - hence the Huntington estate grounds became Botanical Gardens.

To members and the general public, these gardens are simply the grounds of the Huntington Library - which has always suited me just fine. According to Cicero, when you have a garden and a library you have



everything you need, and The Huntington has a heck of a library. Reading our Yelp and TripAdvisor reviews, people remain amusingly surprised the Library includes gardens and art. To me, it is perfect.

Once you manage to find us and discover the Library has plural gardens, you will want to learn to read those gardens and plant collections just as you would a book. But in the shelf of offerings these estate grounds hold, I want to direct you to two particularly botanical destinations.

One is the Desert Garden. Begun around 1906, this 10-acre landscape (along with a semi-public Conservatory and two extensive nursery areas) houses over 5,000 kinds of plants. Of the nearly 1500 naturally occurring cactus species, over 1000 are represented in this collection. But that is not all; this is the world of succulent plants in dazzling opulence.

The other destination is our Rose Hills Conservatory for Botanical Science, which is (I believe) the only science center in the world dedicated to plants. A skilled and dedicated staff work diligently to maintain and improve collections and displays that make this a public learning experience. We hope to give visitors the chance to acquire new skills in observation, make new connections that expand their understanding and appreciation of plants, and enjoy their time in a garden, both independently and as family and friends learning together.

Singapore

For the gardener and botanist the tropics hold permanent allure. Indeed, there is the promise of a plant paradise in the green and growing world of lands between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. But that paradise can be difficult to find, because a suite of predictable trees, palms, hibiscus, and bougainvillea smothers the built landscapes of the lowland equatorial belt. This denies the fact that

such great exuberance and possibilities exist in the rich and beautiful panoply of tropical plants that could be brought into cultivation. Even botanical gardens, noted for diversity, usually disappoint - not because of intent or effort, but due to simple poverty. The lowland tropics are nearly synonymous with what we used to call third-world economies. Times are hard at these latitudes, and public Gardens do not thrive.



But there is at least one prosperous culture that is the exception. Practically astride the equator, the island nation of Singapore is a land that has decided to imbed itself in a garden, assuring a green and gracious potential is met. In that land, plant specialists have blossomed, and two remarkable, standard-setting gardens have taken hold.

If you seek an ultimate gardening and plant adventure, then head to Singapore, with every intention to spend a full day exploring Singapore Botanic Gardens (SBG) and another touring Gardens By the Bay (GB). The possibilities are so extensive that pointing to favorites in these landscapes is not in the cards, but do not miss the Orchid Garden at



SBG or the Cloud Forest at GB. The orchid garden is the most developed such display in the world, and even that display is the tip of an iceberg



when you consider the extensive collection it highlights. The cloud forest is the only exhibit I know that captures the joy I felt on visiting my first real natural cloud forest in Central America.

Iceland

In July, 2016, my wife Deb and I took an opportunity to visit Akureyri's Lystigardur Akureyrar, the "northern-most" botanical garden in Iceland (65° 40' 30" N), as well as its partner, Iceland's almost most northern botanical garden, which is in Reykjavik. If you have a chance to visit in July, that is certainly a peak time to view the many organized collections of perennial plants. For those of us who live in Southern California, a July visit is a moment to view primulas, poppies (especially Blue Poppies) columbines, and larkspurs in their absolute prime.



Rock gardens are a popular landscape form in Iceland, and the Reykjavik Botanical Garden is rife with rockeries, some still under development. But you will have to work for this encounter; not everyone in town is aware of the garden, which is quite well hidden away. Some locals, however, know the garden has a lovely restaurant and is fine place to while away a bit of one of those endless July days.



[Note some claims are made that the Akureyri Botanical Garden is the world's northernmost botanic garden, but that title seems held by the Arctic-Alpine Botanic Garden in Tromse, Norway (at 69° 40' N).]

CUROSITIES, WITHIN & OUTSIDE MY EXPERIENCE:

A Big Cashew Tree

The world's largest cashew tree grows in the city of Parnamirim, Brasil (Pirangi do Norte district of Rio Grande do Norte). The tree is said to cover two acres, and is a curiosity because lower branches rest on the ground, where they root in place.

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/users/horticulturcat/lists/wonders-of-botany>