

Jardin botanique de Montréal

A visit to the central greenhouse of the Jardin botanique de Montréal is a floral fling in Greece, a stroll through a flower market in Brussels, a quiet hour in a Spanish garden, a leisurely walk around the English countryside--and an experience not soon to be forgotten.

It is the Jardin Botanique, owned and operated by the Ville de Montréal, which has been entrusted with the technical organization of Les Florales internationales de Montréal 1980. Chief horticulturist Pierre Bourque is chairman of Florales' horticulture committee as well as a member of the Organizing Committee.

The world's most beautiful flowers and plants, literally collected from around the globe, fill the Jardin botanique, third greatest of its kind after the gardens of London and Berlin. Some two million visits are recorded each year at the Montréal garden, located at Sherbrooke Street and Pie IX Boulevard, facing the Parc Olympique.

Seasonal shows at the garden, each with a special theme, take on the hues of the changing seasons, running the gamut from beautiful Spring displays of daffodils and tulips to Autumn exhibitions of chrysanthemum, which can turn the area into a corner of Japan, the United States or the USSR.

Between exhibitions, there is a constant renewal of flower groupings with decorative value, such as geraniums, caladiums, gloxinias and bellflowers. At Christmas, the centre is alive with the flaming reds of poinsettia and Jerusalem cherry.

Within the 73-hectare area (180 acres) of the garden, some 20,000 species and varieties of world flora are displayed in 30-odd gardens and nine exhibition greenhouses. Its orchid collection alone--1,200 varieties--is unique.

Founded in 1931 by the late Frère Marie-Victorin (1885-1944) as an educational and research centre, the garden is a veritable treasure house, with specialized gardens and greenhouses touching on a wide-ranging floral spectrum. The garden's first curator, Henry Teuscher, prepared the plans and directed the initial layout work.

Summer is the busiest time of the year at the garden. That's when everything is growing--inside and out. Walk through the test garden for annuals and you see some 500 promising species being cultivated on an experimental basis. Browse around the Monastery Garden and you can view plants which have been in use since the days of Charlemagne. Look around a pond and you find native plants of marsh and forest. Follow the flowery brook and you can examine the beds of irises, daylilies and peonies. Trilliums are in the shade gardens and lotus in the Bog Garden. The Rose Garden defies description.

Winter, however, is a long season, and for this reason, the garden maintains a number of conservatories. Of special interest to many visitors is the tropical greenhouse. Here is the world of the tropical jungle with multi-colored epiphytes perched on trees hung with soft creepers. Here, too, are the spectacular orchids.

Steps away is the tropical fernhouse. Numerous aroids such as the philodendron and dieffenbachia, horticultural varieties used largely to decorate homes, are on view, along with more than 200 species of begonias originating in the warm areas of the world. Columneas, African violets--they, too, have their place.

The arid regions greenhouse fascinates many a visitor. Here are the African euphorbias and American cactus, aloe, agave, haworthia and other species of the desert. There are examples of flora from Mexico, and plants from Australia and New Zealand, including the eucalyptus, the acacias, the copromas and the corynocarpus.

Behind the public greenhouses are numerous service greenhouses where plants are grown for exhibition and where valuable collections are stored for use by specialists.

Like all botanical gardens of international repute, the Jardin botanique serves as more than just a floral conservatory. The complex, with its greenhouses, nurseries and plant collections cultivated by highly qualified personnel, offers virtually unlimited research possibilities. Specifically research-oriented facilities have been set up, among them the Marie-Victorin Herbarium of the Université de Montréal, the herbarium of the garden, the seed collection, and two separate but complementary libraries.

In its scientific role, the garden is aided by the botanical institute of the Université de Montréal, whose professors normally work in two quite different areas: floristic and plant ecology on the one hand, and morphology and anatomy on the other. Sometimes essentially static or analytic, sometimes more dynamic and experimental, the work is carried out on either greenhouse or outdoor plants. Research is also conducted on indigenous plants.