



Riverbanks Botanical Garden

The Riverbanks Botanical Garden opened on June 10, 1995 on one of the most beautiful natural sites in South Carolina. Scenic river views, spectacular valley overlooks, and a walled garden ablaze with color are but a few of the attractions that greet visitors to one of the nation's best botanical gardens, located on the west bank of the Saluda River across from Riverbanks Zoo. The Botanical Garden's site features three distinct topographies: the flood plain valley, the valley slopes and the uplands.

In addition to its natural beauty, the site has significant historical value as the location of one of South Carolina's first water-powered textile mills. In addition, it was on this site that General Sherman's troops camped and fired cannons upon the city of Columbia prior to marching in and burning the city during the Civil War.

The Native Forest

Visitors enter the Garden from a 800-foot, brick-paved bridge across the Saluda River. Immediately they are immersed in the sights and sounds of a lush hardwood forest reminiscent of a mountainside in northwest South Carolina. Huge oaks, maples, birches and hickories tower above a forest floor covered with native flowering shrubbery, vines and ground-hugging plants. A closer look reveals delicate wildflowers, Spanish moss growing on mountain laurel and signs of a thriving native wildlife population.

With such a diverse display of plants already present, river and woodland trails measuring 1/2-mile through the lower two-thirds of the property allow visitors an opportunity to view the naturally landscaped hillside and shoreline. Trams shuttle visitors up a 3/10-mile road to the upper garden area. Where the river trail meets the trail up the hill to the formal Botanical Garden are the ruins of a pre-Civil War textile mill, one of the first of its kind in South Carolina, and a log cabin interpretive center that is a mini-museum about the site.

The Walled Garden

While the floodplain and valley slopes remain nearly untouched, the 12-acre upland tract is the horticultural jewel of the Botanical Garden. Three major spaces have been created here: a visitors center, a walled garden and an amphitheater. Featured are plants that are hardy in our area, but retain a tropical

feel that's particularly spectacular in the summer and fall. Shrub borders, seasonal color borders and perennial borders for every season are displayed.

The tram road ends 135 feet above the Saluda River at the entry court, a festively landscaped transition from the forest garden to the walled garden. From this plaza visitors enter a visitors center complex featuring a gift shop, changing art gallery, offices and multi-purpose spaces designed for flower shows, meetings, classes and social events.

As visitors take their first steps from the Visitors Center into the Walled Garden, they encounter a vision unlike any other in South Carolina. An area larger than a football field has been transformed into an exquisite garden filling the air with the scents, colors and textures of plants from all over the world. An eight-foot-tall brick wall with intricate detailing surrounds the walled garden. A 300-foot-long canal featuring cascades and pinwheel fountains serves as the focal point of the garden, with brick-paved walkways leading visitors from the center of the garden through mazes of formal plantings on either side.

There are several themed areas of the Walled Garden. They change periodically, but have included such ideas as a berry garden, art garden, and midnight garden as well as spring, summer and fall borders and hot, pastel and purple borders. All plants are labeled so visitors can identify their favorites as they stroll through the walled garden.

Riverbanks' Old Rose Garden includes 120 varieties of roses. The rose garden explores the history of roses as well as serves as a transition between the walled garden and the rambling trails to the Saluda River. Three classes of "old" roses are the focus of the garden: Chinas, Teas and Noisettes.

An arched passageway on the north side of the Walled Garden leads visitors to a 2,000-seat amphitheater nestled in a natural grove of tall hardwoods. Terraced and carpeted with cool, green grass, the amphitheater is the perfect spot for Riverbanks-sponsored cultural performances and special educational programs.

Education

The educational opportunities provided by Riverbanks are available nowhere else in South Carolina. Just as Riverbanks Zoo has grown since 1974, the Botanical Garden will continue to develop new garden areas and projects to educate and inspire Garden visitors of all ages. Each month, the horticulture staff, in conjunction with Clemson Extension, designs a variety of classes that are available to anyone from the weekend novice to the master gardener.