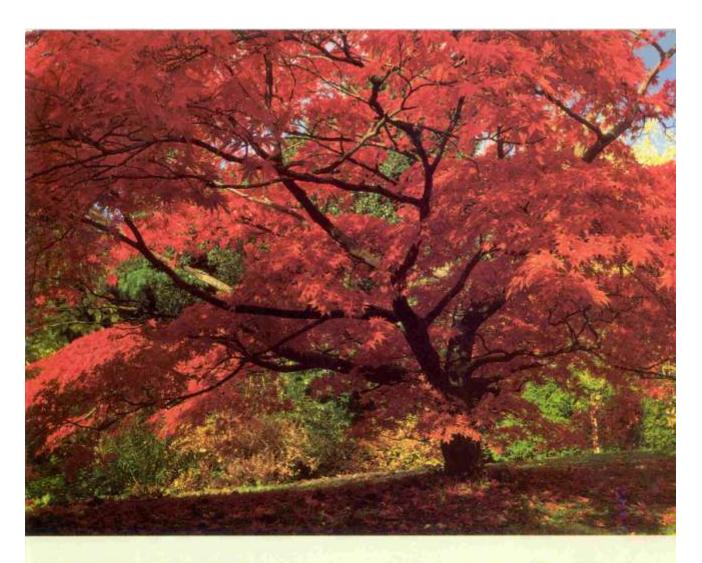


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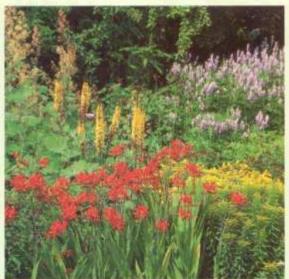
Some gardens are one-season wonders; a few are spectacular all year round.

Definitely one of the latter, Bath Botanical Gardens' continuous display

is hard to beat. Words and photographs by Jane Gifford







Top left: a thick carpet of red, gold and yellow leaves, including Ginigo bilobo, black mulberry and sweet gum. Top: Acer pointaum makes a striking display in the wild flower garden. Above, left: Magnolio x soulangeana surrounded by 'Mount Hood' daffodils. Above, right: a summer border featuring Crocosmia 'Lucifer', Ligularia przewalskii 'The Rocket', Galego officinalis, Macleaya cordate and solidago.



Crawling around Queen Square in heavy traffic, Instrated by Bath's one-way system, it's tempting to leave your car right where it is and walk across Victoria Park away from the chaos. If you did, you might chance upon Bath Botanical Gardens and if you stopped there for a while, you might forget that you had anything pressing to do in town. Not much more than 150 years ago, the same route would have taken you across open pasture and a jumble of allotments into a disused quarry.

But since then, the grazing land has become the neat green expanses of Victoria Park, while the land surrounding the old quarry has been transformed into a secluded garden, where you can opt out of the 20th century for

Above: fed by spring water from

Lansdown and overlooked by the Temple

of Minerva, the pond

reflects a wonderful display of colour

produced by Japanese maples and

Cotonedster horizontalis. Left: ornamental

sea holly, Eryngium amethystinum,

in the thistie bed. Right: the autumn berries

of Callicorpa bodinieri giraldii.

enthusiasts in 1887. Bath Botanical Gardens have become a welcome you might place of escape for residents and an unexpected find for visitors, here for a Perhaps because they are slightly off the beaten track, the Botanical in town.

Gardens are not well known. I originally came across them by accident ave taken — by far the best way. Within a relatively small space of some ten acres, you are pleasantly surprised by sanken rock gardens and informal drifts.

of wild flowers, an ornamental vegetable garden, gaunt conifers and, overlooking a clear pond, a small replica of the Temple of Minerva, which was Bath's exhibit at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924.







You might be drawn to the cool, dappled shade of The Dell in the heart of the quarry, overlooked by some of the oldest trees in the park, or wander into more formal corners of the gardens with views across the town. It's a perfect place for contemplation. Walkways have been land-scaped and planted so that each part of the gardens is obscured from the rest – even when people are about, you can usually find a quiet spot. Asked to take photographs for the new catalogue and guide to the

Botanical Gardens, I had the perfect excuse to return again and again to follow the seasons around the flowerbeds and trees. Acer pseudoplatamus Brilliantissimum is a delight in its salmon-pink speing foliage and, in a

by a carpet of its fallen petals.

Left: decorative rhubarb chard and parsley in the ornamental vegetable garden. Right:

Magnolia lilliflora 'Nigra' is remarkable for its large, fragrant,

richly coloured flowers, set off by

dark green leaves.

Above: Prunus 'Shirofugen' surrounded

season direnched in pink blossom from cherries and magnolias, camassias bloom in softest China blue. A particularly large example of *Cormus kousa chimensis* becomes a galaxy of stars in summer, covered in clusters of minuscule flowers, each one surrounded by four large waxy white bracts. And in its autumn foliage, *Cormus kousa* is a fiery, scarlet dome.

For me, the most magical features of Bath Botanical Gardens are the drifts of flowers that ebb and flow over lawns and banks throughout the

year. Blue, pink and white waves of Anemone blanda wash over The Dell in spring. Delscate red and white striped pools of Tulipa clusiuna gather under the trees, surrounded by Tenby and hoop petticout daffodils. Elsewhere,





snowdrops and crocuses, scillas and frinllaries rise and fide back into the turf. And, as the leaves start to fall, the delicate pink flowers of Cyclamen cilicicum force their way through the beech must that softens the seeep banks of the old quarry.

The pond below the Temple of Minerva is small and, like so many features of the gardens, it's possible to miss altogether. But this only adds to the gardens' charm, as each visit brings new staprises. In autumn, the

pond reflects a wonderful display of colour, with scarlet, orange and amber acces rising above red-berned cotoneasters.

Acers are scattered throughout the Botanical Gardens and their extravagance of colour is

Above: the early spring-flowering

Anemone blands, in delicate shades
of pink and white, grows in profusion in

The Dell. Left: peonies growing
in the shrubbery. Right: drifts of brightly
coloured 'Apeldoorn' tulips
are just some of the many flowers
that ebb and flow over the lawns and
banks throughout the year.

hard to overlook. More subtle autumn treats can be found in evergreen strawberry tree, which produces both red fleshy fruits clusters of small white flowers. Earlier on in the season, the invencombination of Nicotiana sylvestris and impatiens was resplenden remainental beds, while the deep blue gentian, Gentiuma septemphotomed more discreetly in a corner of the peat garden.

If early autumn frosts are severe, many of the trees lose their lear

which is disappointing. But in compensat the lawns are inches thick with a wonde mosaic of gold, yellow and brown. Green yellow ginkgo leaves are distinctive in a gle of yellow and red Acer palmation:





A. japonicum. The vivid scarlet leaves of Liquidambar styraciflua are extraordinary as the melting ice intensifies their colour. The fastigiate hombeans manage to hang on to their yellow foliage, while dense clusters of purple bernies on Callicarpa bodinieri giraldii are quite a shock against so much yellow and red. When autumn colour fades, heather beds carry soft tones of pink and purple through the winter months. Bath Botanical Gardens are not a place of scientific research and dis-

covery. There are many fine specimens, but no great rarities. Stan Hitt, responsible for the gardens from 1966-1987, explains that the collection is made up to a large extent from public donations. His main aim, now continued

Above: Crocus tomasinianus clusters
thickly beneath a Japanese maple
in the wild flower garden. Left:
the autumn foliage of a tree peony. Right:
a summer border, filled with
Penstemon 'Evelyn', coreopsis,
Salvia x superba, Anaphalis triplinervis
and Cephalaria gigantea, leads up to

the Temple of Minerva.

by his successor David Littlewood, is simply to encourage a love of plants and gardens in all who spend time here – and his team of gardeners have been successful in this. As well as people pottering, flowersmelling and note-taking, I have seen schoolchildren happily sketching flowers, music and dance studenss rehearsing in quiet corners, clandestine meetings, and people and their dogs pondering life. The Botanical Gardens appear to have a therapeutic effect on everyone.

Bath Botanical Gardens, Royal Victoria Park, Bath, are open all year from dawn to dusk. For further information, contact Bath Botanical Gardens, 15a Milsom Street, Bath BA1 1DE, (0225) 448433.

