14 Gardens to Visit Before You Die

Looking for a colorful escape? These global gardens are among the most spectacular, inspiring -- and fragrant! -- spots on Earth.

BY THE HORTICULT OF THE HORTICULT

1. Lotusland in Montecito, California

Set on 37 astonishing acres outside Santa Barbara, this estate belonged to Polish opera singer Madame Ganna Walska, who lived large but gardened even larger. Yes, she was married six times, but we're more interested in the legions of plants she acquired for her Japanese, desert, "blue," and "theatre" gardens. The annual summer blooming of the lotus pond is a must-see.

Photo by The Horticult

2. Singapore Botanic Gardens in Singapore

This property was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015 -- the only tropical garden to receive this honor. Brush up against 400 varieties of medicinal plants in the Healing Garden, go back in time in the Evolution Garden, or enter a technicolor dream space in the House of Bromeliads. (The gingers are another draw.) Tropical plants grow on a huge scale here, where the giant Joey palm must be seen to be believed.

Photo by The Horticult

"World’s largest" -- you’ll hear that a lot when it comes to Kew. The legendary garden (just a half-hour outside central London) holds the world’s largest and most diverse collections of plants and fungi. You can spend days here amid the alpine flora, historical treasures, treetop walkway, and some of the largest Victorian glasshouses in existence. The herbarium, meanwhile, is over 7 million specimens strong.

Photo by RBG Kew

4. Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

This 1,077-acre garden boasts over 10,000 different kinds of plants in landscapes both manicured and pastoral. Fountains and colored lighting complement mind-bending collections dedicated to oaks, azaleas, bonsai, lilacs, and over 2,000 taxa of orchids. The central pond’s giant Victoria water lily is famed for pads that average 6 feet across. Longwood’s Meadow Garden, opened in 2014, features three miles of trails and four learning pavilions.

Photo public domain / courtesy of Longwood Gardens, via Wikimedia Commons
5. Desert Botanical Gardens in Scottsdale, Arizona

Get up close and personal with the amazing plants of the Sonoran Desert. Aloeas bloom in a sea of fiery shades, native wildflowers light up loop trails, and in the fall monarch butterflies float en masse. And of course, this garden is also the place to learn about the region’s iconic saguaro cactus, which is such a slow grower that it takes up to 75 years to sprout its first arm.

Photo by The Horticult

6. Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town, South Africa

Kirstenbosch was devoted to Indigenous plants before it was trendy. The diversity of southern Africa’s flora is on display in this garden set against the eastern slopes of Table Mountain. Discover otherworldly protea and pincushions, a “near-complete” collection of cycads, and a psychedelic array of Namaqualand daisies (blooming in spring) alongside rotating sculpture exhibits.

Photo by David Stanley, CC by 2.0, via Flickr

No matter the weather, no matter the time of year, you can dive into a colorful sea of blossoms just 20 minutes from Grand Central Station. At NYBG, you'll find extraordinary plants from South American cloud forests (like that beautiful oddball, the neotropical blueberry), skyscraping agave flowers, and paperback maples with gleaming bronze bark.

Photo by The Horticult

8. Villa Lante in Bagnaia, Italy

A Renaissance feat of terraces and topiary, Villa Lante offers alfresco oohs and ahhs in central Italy. The design is Mannerist, with hedging manicured into jaw-dropping, perfectly proportioned geometric shapes. Behold nods to the Vatican and ancient Greece around a breathtaking central fountain.

Photo by Julia Maudlin, via Flickr
9. Gardens by the Bay in Singapore

Climb up a mountain of plants in the Cloud Forest or walk along the Skyway between Supertrees here in Gardens by the Bay, which is like an amusement park for plants. The garden's master design plan was developed via an international competition, with a focus on environmental sustainability. Just one more reason to visit the Garden City!

Photo by The Horticult

10. Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, South Carolina

The oldest public gardens in the United States, this Low Country landmark is distinguished by a relaxed, romantic-style landscape. Come for the magnolias and stay for the camellias, hibiscus, and dignified live oaks along the water. Don't miss the swamp garden!

Photo by The Horticult
11. Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech, Morocco

Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé bought Jardin Majorelle in 1980 after falling in love with "this oasis where colors used by Matisse were mixed with those of nature." (The public garden was this close to becoming a hotel complex.) The site is both a fashion-lover's dream and a gardener's haven, thanks to the towering euphorbias and cacti, exuberant yucca and bougainvillea, and jewel-color facades and ceramics.

Photo by Viault, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

12. Butchart Gardens in Brentwood Bay, British Columbia

This Canadian wonderland is, ahem, a perennial favorite on "most beautiful gardens" lists. Here, theatrically colored flowers and foliage grow on shapely landscapes. Close to 300,000 bulbs bloom from mid-March through May. The rose garden is a life-altering stunner in summer. Amazingly, the garden grows on the site of a former limestone quarry.

Photo by Robtheipiper CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons
13. Jardin Botanico de Quito in Quito, Ecuador

Ecuador's biodiversity is among the greatest on Earth, and this urban botanic garden lets you see much of it in one place. Wander among the ferns and epiphytes, and fall in love in the orchidario that houses wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling orchids representative of the country's unparalleled 4,200 species. There's even a section dedicated to medicinal plants.

Photo by The Horticult


Versailles is grand and all, but when it comes to do-before-you-die gardens, we'd rather spend an afternoon in Jardin du Luxembourg. Neon clusters of perennials (like iris) add a feeling of spontaneity to palace grounds in Paris's 6th arrondissement. Bistro tables under the leafy allées are ideal for dates. And the big lawn invites you to sprawl in style.

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