

5

Western Gardens That Wow

From roses to cacti, these outdoor wonderlands showcase natural beauty all year long

BY SUSAN LANIER-GRAHAM

Botanical gardens across the Western United States offer amazing opportunities for visitors to explore the world around them, experiencing everything from native plants to exotic foliage. These gardens vary from desert landscapes filled with cacti and succulents to hothouses brimming with exotic orchids to rugged seaside cliff walks. Some gardens also house animals, birds, children's activities, petting zoos, carousels, miniature trains, art, and antiques.

Many of the gardens in the West participate in the American Horticultural Society's Reciprocal Admissions Program, including the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix. If you become a member of the Desert Botanical Garden, your membership entitles you to visit more than 300 gardens and arboreta around the country for either reduced or free admission.

Featured are five of the best gardens in the West.

1 Desert Botanical Garden

The Desert Botanical Garden sits on 140 acres in Phoenix's Papago Park (adjacent to the Phoenix Zoo). Founded in 1936, the Desert Botanical Garden provides an ideal way to experience the beauty of the Sonoran Desert with more than 50,000 plants — from massive saguaro cacti and mesquite trees to herb and butterfly gardens.

There are a variety of trails at the botanical garden, each offering unique experiences. The Desert Discovery Loop Trail includes an agave yucca forest and seasonal butterfly exhibits. The Plants and People of the Sonoran Desert

Trail covers one-third of a mile and winds its way through five distinct desert habitats. Popular features are the exhibits that illustrate lifestyles of the Western Apache, Tohono O'odham, and Hispanic people of Arizona.

If you visit in early spring, walk the Harriet K. Maxwell Desert Wildflower Loop. At its peak in March and April, this 2-acre parcel offers a breathtaking array of flowering desert plants.

2 San Francisco Botanical Garden

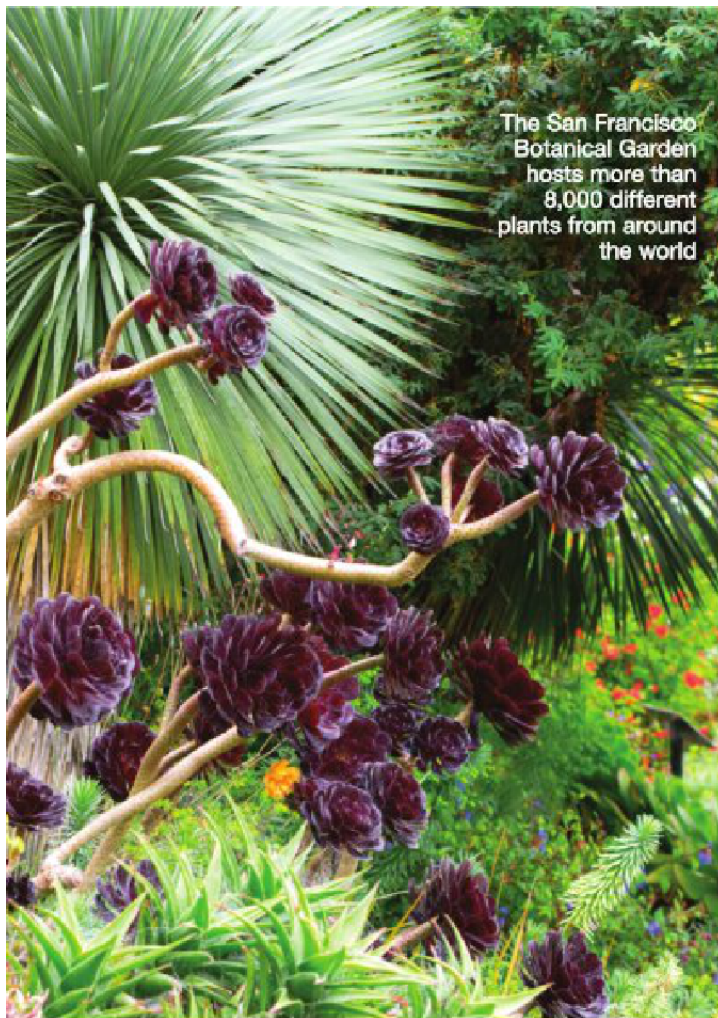
The San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum covers 55 acres within the massive 1,000-acre Golden Gate Park. San Francisco's mild temperatures make an ideal growing environment for more than

8,000 different plants from around the world. Because of the diversity, you'll find something blooming throughout the year.

April and May are ideal months to visit the botanical garden's 4-acre California Native Gardens, featuring arroyos, ponds, and woodlands surrounding a wildflower meadow. One of the most unusual collections is the Ancient Plant Garden that houses the primeval-looking Chilean plant known as "dinosaur food." The San Francisco Botanical Garden is known for its collection of almost 100 magnolia trees. They bloom each year from mid-January through March, depending on the weather, and fill the air with the sweetest fragrance.

You can explore the garden all day, enjoy a picnic lunch, and even join one of the daily docent-led tours. There are plenty of stroller- and wheelchair-friendly paths, or if you





The San Francisco Botanical Garden hosts more than 8,000 different plants from around the world

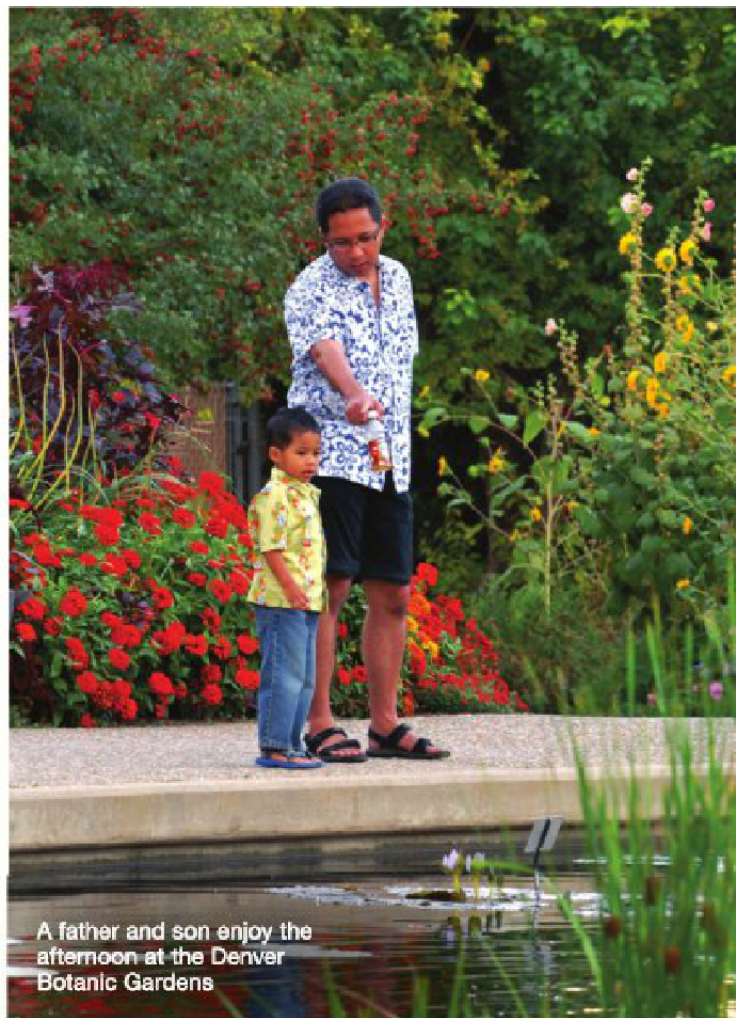
© Susan Lanier-Graham

are so inclined, get off the main paths and explore. The San Francisco Botanical Garden is part of the Reciprocal Admissions Program.

3 Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

Few botanical gardens are located on the coast, but that's exactly where you'll find the 47-acre Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens in Fort Bragg, California. There is an easy half-mile walk that takes you to the water's edge. Along the way, you'll pass the Perennial Garden, which showcases plants from unexpected places, such as the Himalayas and Chile. Numerous trails wind through beautiful woodlands and the garden's signature rhododendrons, varying from large trees to delicate dwarf varieties. The rhododendrons usually are in full bloom from early April through mid-May.

Be sure to stop by the Dahlia Garden, a collection of more than 450 dahlias tucked into the forest that bloom in late summer. As you come to the end of the trail, before it loops back toward the entrance, you'll find yourself on



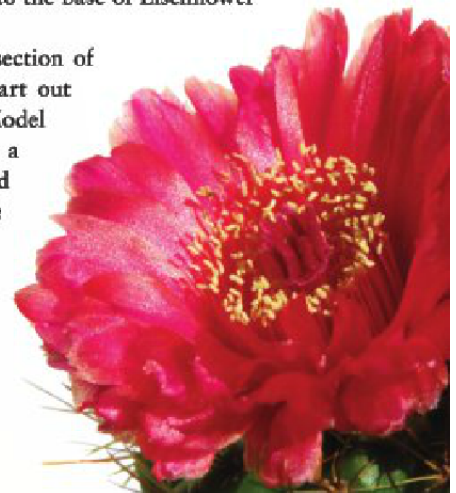
A father and son enjoy the afternoon at the Denver Botanic Gardens

coastal bluff meadows, where you can watch waves crash on the rocks below. The Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens is part of the Reciprocal Admissions Program.

4 The Living Desert Zoo & Gardens

The Living Desert in Palm Desert, California, is a natural preserve on 1,200 acres of Sonoran Desert located just outside Palm Desert. There are 120 developed acres filled with animals and gardens, along with exhibits and animal-care facilities. Across 1,080 undeveloped acres, explore three trails — a flat, quarter-mile, casual loop; a moderately strenuous 1-mile hike through a boulder field; and a 3.5-mile wilderness loop to the base of Eisenhower Mountain.

In the North America section of The Living Desert, you start out at the massive G-Scale Model Train Exhibit featuring a re-creation of the Grand Canyon. Then, continue on to see bighorn sheep, eagles, wolves, a palm oasis aviary, and a variety of gardens high-

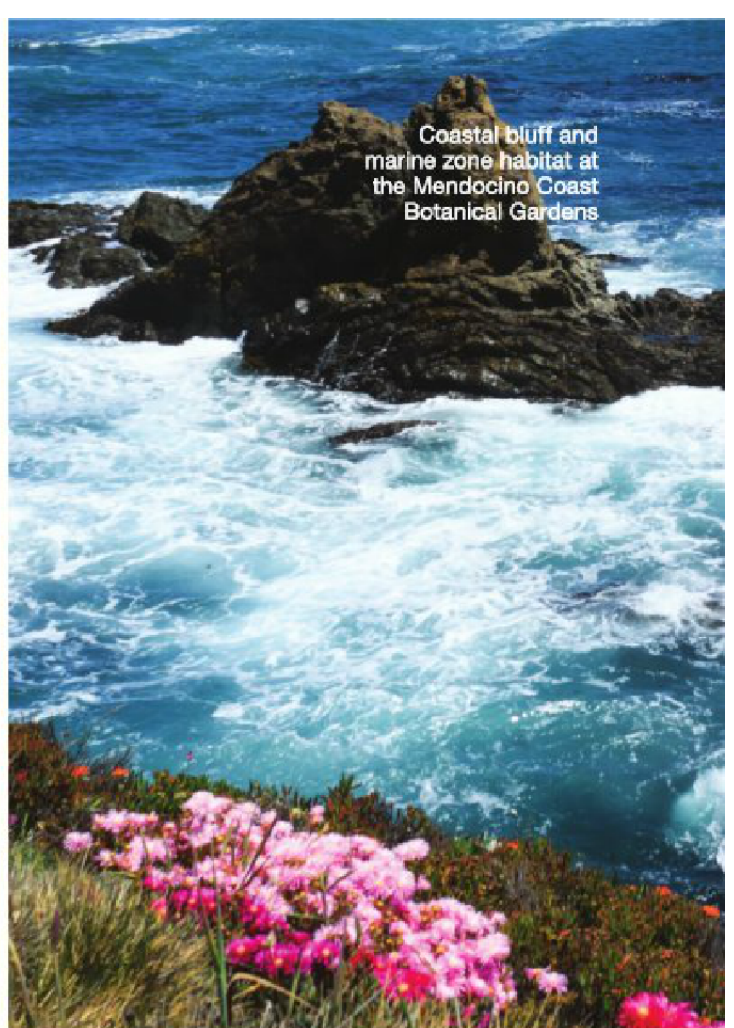


CALIFORNIA GARDENS

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Coastal bluff and marine zone habitat at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

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lighting cactus, agave, and even sage. In the Africa section, visit the aloe or Madagascar gardens, and then check out oryxes, cheetahs, zebras, leopards, and gazelles.

5 Denver Botanic Gardens

York Street Gardens is the main facility at Denver Botanic Gardens, containing seven major collections, including three gardens that showcase the plants of Colorado from the plains to the mountains.

Even though days in Denver may be chilly during the winter and early spring months, the garden has several indoor spaces, including the waterfalls and orchid display in Marnie's Pavilion, that make the garden a lovely spot to visit year-round. The Boettcher Memorial

Tropical Conservatory displays hundreds of tropical plants and includes a large collection of bromeliads and palms.

One of the newest features at the Denver Botanic Gardens is the Science Pyramid, which uses modern technology to explore plants and climates around the world. The

Mordecai Children's Garden, open March through October, gives kids a unique opportunity to explore and interact with the natural world. The Denver Botanic Gardens is part of the Reciprocal Admissions Program.

SUSAN LANIER-GRAHAM is a Phoenix-based freelance travel writer who likes to wander the world looking for "wow" moments.

If You Go

Desert Botanical Garden
1201 N. Galvin Pkwy.
Phoenix, AZ
480-941-1225
dbg.org

San Francisco Botanical Garden
1199 9th Ave.
San Francisco, CA
415-661-1316
sfbotanicalgarden.org

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens
18220 California State Highway 1
Fort Bragg, CA
707-964-4352
gardenbythesea.org

Living Desert Zoo & Gardens
47900 Portola Ave.
Palm Desert, CA
760-348-5694
livingdesert.org

Denver Botanic Gardens
1007 York St.
Denver, CO
720-866-3500
botanogardens.org

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