

# 12 Great Rivertown Gardens



By Pamela Eyden

Photos courtesy of gardens and volunteers

*Listening to music in a garden on the banks of the Mississippi is a taste of heaven at St. Cloud's Munsinger Gardens.*

Many people find gardening relaxing, but isn't it even more relaxing to visit a garden where somebody else has done all the work? Fortunately, there are many outstanding and unusual gardens in Upper Mississippi river towns. Try to visit several this summer.

## Munsinger and Clemens Gardens

Riverside Drive S.E., St. Cloud, Minn.  
320-257-5959

The historic Munsinger Garden sits on the banks of the Mississippi River. The city bought the land where a sawmill used to stand, in 1915. Groves of

now-mature Scotch and Norway pine were planted by Girl Scouts soon after, and in the 1930s the WPA built stone-lined paths, a lily pond and a rock fountain.

Munsinger is an informal cottage-style garden. The adjacent Clemens Garden is a formal garden filled with colorful, sun-loving annuals. There's a rose garden with 1,100 kinds of roses, a white garden, and a 24-foot dome covered with clematis, roses and morning glories.

"We are friends with our neighbors, who like to walk through on their way to restaurants and shops, and with the many canoers who come through. The garden is near a hydropower dam, so paddlers use the garden to portage," said garden supervisor Nia Primus. "The staff keeps watch for people paddling from the Headwaters to the Gulf to hand out 'care packages' of granola and snacks."

In June, July and August Munsinger serves root beer floats at Sunday afternoon concerts near the river. On July 16 there's an art fair.

Admission is free.



*Tulips beckon visitors to the Munsinger Gardens.*

## Bakken Museum Gardens

3537 Zenith Avenue S., Minneapolis, Minn.  
612-926-3878

Four gardens surround an English Tudor-style mansion that houses the Bakken Museum of Electricity, which is devoted to an exploration of electricity — think electric fish, magnets, Frankenstein's lab and a theramin, the first electric musical instrument.

The Medicinal Garden, with its formal, geometric pool and arbor, was inspired by medieval gardens connected to monasteries or medical schools, that grew supplies of herbs and medicinal plants. The Dakota Native Plants Garden occupies a natural wetland that still filters water that runs into nearby Lake Calhoun, as it did when the Dakota Indians lived in the area. There is also a Heart Healthy Garden and a Green Energy Art Garden.

Admission (\$7 adult, \$5 senior or child) includes admission to the museum. On the second Saturday of the month admission is free.

## Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at Como Park

1225 Estabrook Drive, St. Paul, Minn.  
651-487-8201

The Como Park Conservatory, built in 1915, is one of the few remaining glass-domed, Victorian-style gardens in the U.S. The 65-foot-high central dome houses tall palm trees and is flanked by a sunken garden for seasonal flower shows, a wing for tropical plants used in foods and medicines, and a cool, moist fern room planted with ferns of all sizes, from tiny to tree-size. The conservatory also has a special collection of bonsai trees.

The conservatory is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year with a lively calendar of events.

"We're going to party all summer," promised Tina Dombrowski, horticulture manager, starting with a ribbon cutting for the new Centennial Garden, designed to feel like a garden from 100 years ago — an outdoor room bounded by hedges and anchored by a central fountain. The party kicks off June 19 to 21.

On Wednesday evenings from June 17 through August, visitors are invited to bring picnics for "groovin' in the garden," with music for adults and a



The 100-year-old dome at St. Paul's Como Park Conservatory allows abundant light for eye-popping sunken gardens.

climbing wall, bouncy house and lawn games for the kids. A Japanese Lantern Lighting Festival is on August 23.

Admission is free, but a \$3 donation is suggested.

## Hotel de Ville

305 Main St., Alma, Wis.  
612-423-3653

The walled gardens behind the Hotel de Ville Bed and Breakfast on Alma's Main Street were inspired by owner Daniel Kordiak's trips to Europe. They are bounded by a terraced 27-foot stone wall with miniature boxwood hedges, a formal garden, a fountain and seven bronze sculptures. Visitors are welcome to enter through the Fire and Ice ice cream shop on Main Street.

This summer Kordiak plans to build a 12-foot wall on the south side of the garden with two turrets reminiscent of Germany's Neuschwanstein Castle.

Admission is free.

## Prairie Moon Nursery

32115 Prairie Lane, Winona, Minn.  
866-417-8156

Prairie Moon is a native plant nursery that specializes in growing and harvesting seeds from plants that are indigenous to the Upper Midwest — big bluestem, bunch flower, water hemlock, blue joint grass, Kankakee mallow, tall larkspur, spiked lobelia, wild



Stop in Alma, Wis., for a restful retreat behind Hotel de Ville on Main Street.

quinine, indigo, butterfly weed, plantain and dozens more. They garden on a landscape scale. Tours are available to groups if they call ahead and make arrangements, but please don't drop in. Plants are only sold online and through the catalog.

The annual open house will be held Saturday, July 11, from 1 to 4 p.m. Admission is free.



Left: Butterfly weed lights up the prairie at Prairie Moon Nursery.

Below: Prairie Moon staff members out standing in their field of echinacea.



### Dubuque Arboretum and Botanical Gardens

3800 Arboretum Dr., Dubuque, Iowa  
563-556-2100

This 56-acre arboretum and garden is funded entirely with donations and maintained by more than 300 dedicated volunteers working with a single paid staff member.

The grounds include a formal English garden, knot garden, rose garden, herb garden, woodland and prairie wildflowers, and grasses, as well as a collection of special conifers. The hosta garden is world famous, with more than 2,000 plants of many different colors. The Midwest Regional Hosta Society Convention will have a show there July 9 to 11.

There are concerts in the garden every Sunday afternoon from June 11 to the end of August. The rose festival is June 20.

Admission is free.

### Linmar Gardens

504 S. Prospect St., Galena, Ill.  
815-777-1177

This 3.5-acre private garden sits on a rocky hill overlooking downtown Galena. It includes annuals, perennials, hostas, grasses, daylilies, a brook, pond and a 25-foot waterfall. A sunken garden occupies the ruins of one of the first African-American churches in Illinois.

Call for directions. Tours are \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors.

### Bellevue Butterfly Garden

Bellevue State Park, Bellevue, Iowa  
563-872-4019

The one-acre, open-air garden was designed to attract butterflies with nectar plants for adults and host plants for caterpillars. About 60 species of butterflies visit each year. Most are local residents.

Migratory monarch butterflies pass through, usually in September. Monarch Watch recognizes the garden as a "monarch way station," because it includes a variety of milkweeds to support this beleaguered butterfly.

The garden has a pond and is surrounded by cottonwoods, hackberry, cherry and willow trees. It is adjacent to a three-acre prairie preserve, also



Thousands of hostas luxuriate in the shade at the Dubuque Arboretum and Botanical Gardens.



Above: The tree-lined Grand Allee invites visitors for a stroll at Vander Veer Botanical Gardens in Davenport, Iowa.

Left: Both human and winged visitors enjoy Bellevue, Iowa's, Butterfly Gardens.



Dwarf conifers abound at the Bickelhaupt Arboretum in Clinton, Iowa.

used for research and education. A network of pathways allows easy exploration. The best time to visit are calm sunny days in late July and August.

Admission is free.

### Seed Savers

3094 N. Winn Rd., Decorah, Iowa  
563-382-5990

This 890-acre farm has a mission to conserve and promote America's culturally diverse but endangered garden and food crop heritage for future generations by collecting, growing, and sharing heirloom seeds and plants. Many thousands of heirloom garden varieties are maintained here. There are also demonstration gardens, a heritage orchard with antique varieties of fruit trees and many old grapes from the collection of famed grape breeder Elmer Swenson, a modern visitor center and an Amish-built barn.

Admission is free.

### Bickelhaupt Arboretum

340 S. 14th St., Clinton, Iowa  
563-242-4771

The 13-acre arboretum on the grounds of a once-private house hosts many special collections and displays more than 2,000 trees, shrubs, perennials and wildflowers — all manicured, with many vistas, a creek and a bridge. The garden was privately funded for 45 years and was recently donated to Eastern Iowa Community College.

The arboretum has an award-winning collection of 400 species of dwarf conifers. Director of programming Margo Hansen explained, "Some are just six inches tall. Some are weeping. Some grow along the ground. They have many different colors and shapes, with some unusual cones and twisted needles." There is a grove of Alberta spruce that imitates a miniature forest.

Admission is free.

### Vander Veer Botanical Park

215 W. Central Park Ave., Davenport, Iowa  
563-326-7818

The 33-acre Botanical Park sits at the center of the Vander Veer Park Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

Visitors may stroll from the conservatory to the stone fountain along the Grande Allee, under an arcade of shade trees. The park grounds include gardens and fountains like those popular in Europe in the 19th Century.

The garden's theme this summer is "enchanted park," and will feature a fairy realm, gnomes, dragons and a troll bridge, with a free educational field guide.

Admission is free.

### Quad Cities Botanical Garden

2525 4th Ave., Rock Island, Ill.  
309-794-0991

This garden, established in 1998, has an indoor tropical plant atrium, outdoor gardens, a children's garden with a child-sized model of the Mississippi River, an educational greenhouse and more. Special collections include spring irises, summer day lilies, chrysanthemums and ornamental grasses, as well as an open air butterfly garden that attracts all kinds of pollinators.

Admission for adults is \$6, seniors \$5, youths 6-15 years \$4, 2-5 years \$2, and under 2 years free. ♿

*Pamela Eyden is news and photo editor.*