



Seattle's Secret Gardens

Everyone loves Pike Place Market. In fact, up to 40,000 visitors a day flock to the waterfront to watch clowning fishmongers and admire the masses of colorful flowers offered by local growers. I've lived in Seattle and know that, despite its cacophony, "the market" is the soul of this very special city.

I also know that the region's most beautiful blooms and remarkable plants are not at Pike Place. They are tucked away in secret gardens on Bainbridge Island — a 35-minute ferry ride across Puget Sound. This rustic residential community is home to writers, artists, craftspeople, and — according to *Sunset* magazine — "the most passionate gardeners in the world."

At the 150-acre Bloedel Reserve, thousands of perennials, bulbs, and wildflowers bloom among the rhododendrons in late spring and early summer. In the fall, more than 10,000 »

The French-style mansion at the Bloedel Reserve, once a family home, is open to visitors by reservation

« cyclamen plants steal the scene. My favorite spot is the sweeping lawn where towering weeping willows provide a backdrop for flocks of Canadian geese.

At Bloedel, the reservation system assures that the property is never crowded and guests can enjoy quiet walks in the woodlands and reflective time in the gardens. Impeccably-maintained trails wind through 84 acres of second-growth forest, and the grounds also include The Reflection Garden, The Japanese Garden, ponds, meadows, and a bird refuge that is home to trumpeter swans. The reserve was once the home of the Bloedel family, and their French-style mansion on a bluff overlooking Port Madison Bay is open to visitors. (www.bloedelreserve.org)

As much as the Bloedel estate is about all things natural, Little & Lewis Garden Gallery is about man's efforts to complement nature. Specifically, two men: George Little, a sculpture and water colorist, and David Lewis, an archaeological illustrator. The pair create color-washed concrete garden sculptures and paintings, which have been included in numerous exhibits, purchased by collectors across the country, and lauded by — among others — Martha Stewart.

The winding path through their small garden is lined with unusual plants and whimsical garden art, fountains, wall hangings, and containers. Their signature Doric, Tuscan, and Egyptian columns are used as fountains and lend a vertical element to a garden. They also make clever decorative mirrors that light up dark corners. Little and Lewis have sold property, but it will be open to visitors by appointment during this summer. (www.littleandlewis.com)

You don't need a reservation to visit Bainbridge Gardens. The popular nursery is open daily and offers a free-of-



The New Rose Cafe in Bainbridge Gardens Nursery is a delightful spot for lunch or a snack surrounded by beautiful plants

charge feast for the senses. Here you'll find very mature Japanese red pines grown from seeds brought from Japan in 1908. The Harui Memorial Garden features a pear tree that owner Junkoh Harui's father grafted into an exquisite topiary and an old wisteria that drapes over a bamboo trellis near bonsai pines.

With winter rains, summer sun, and temperatures similar to southern England, Bainbridge Island's climate supports hardy Mediterranean, tropical, and native plants. The nursery sprawls over seven acres, and it takes me several hours to peruse all the quality specimens of trees, shrubs, and perennials. (www.bainbridgegardens.com)

If You Go

Skiff Point Guest House offers two suites overlooking Puget Sound and the Seattle skyline. (www.skiffpoint.com) The Eagle Harbour Inn in Winslow is walking distance from the ferry terminal. (www.theeagleharborinn.com) The Harbour Public House serves great pub meals and a beautiful view over Eagle Harbour Marina. On Winslow Way, The Blackbird Bakery makes yummy muffins and the best carrot cake I have ever tasted. (www.bainbridgechamber.com)



Little & Lewis Garden Gallery offers creative garden sculptures and concrete wall hangings



According to *Sunset* magazine, Bainbridge Island is home to "the most passionate gardeners in the world"

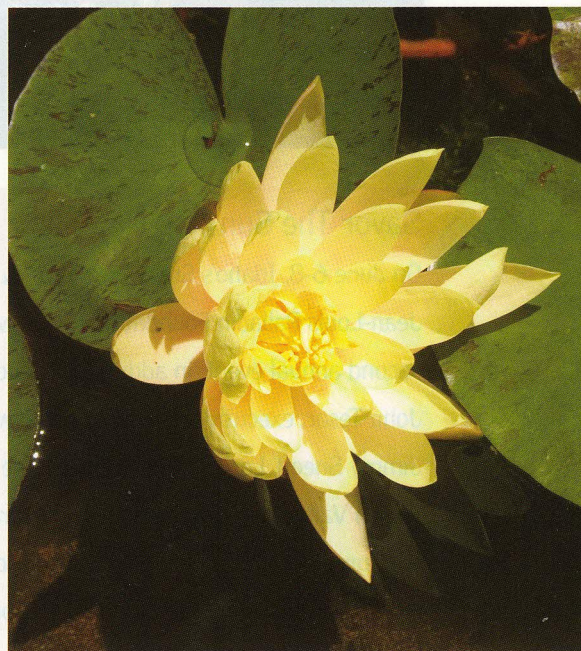
Along the way, I stop at the New Rose Café sited in the middle of the nursery. This delightful spot offers creative salads, sandwiches, soups, and irresistible pastries. On my last visit, I relished a portobello, pesto, tomato, and provolone sandwich and a still-warm-from-the-oven chocolate chip cookie bar. The best tables are on the patio, but an indoor area is available for inclement days.

Plants from this exceptional nursery are included in the island's most impressive home gardens. Most of these are not visible from the road — very long driveways are the norm in this area — but five of them can be viewed on the annual Bainbridge in Bloom Garden Tour. Spanning three days, the popular event includes lectures, food, and an art fair.

This year, the tour starts on Friday, July 11, which is Patron Day — meaning guests can visit the gardens independently, will be treated to docent tours and refreshments at each home, and have the option of enjoying a box lunch with Lewis and Little in their garden. "Benefactors" start Patron Day with coffee at Little & Lewis and are invited to lunch in a

More Secrets

The La Jolla Historical Society's tenth annual Secret Garden Tour of Old La Jolla will take place on Saturday, May 10. The tour provides a rare opportunity to explore the hidden gardens of some of La Jolla's most charming homes. (www.lajollahistory.org)



garden that is not on the Tour. On Saturday and Sunday, participants must travel between the private gardens on special Garden Tour shuttle buses or by bicycle. (www.gardentour.info)

Exotic plants predominate at Little & Lewis Garden Gallery

Puget Sound garden guru Ciscoe Morris is this year's Bainbridge in Bloom featured speaker. The selected gardens include one with 240 species of rhododendrons, another that features drought tolerant plants, and another that is notable for the bold use of foliage color. Mesogeo Garden — rich in Mediterranean and hardy tropical plants — is on the Tour, as is another with a big vista over Eagle Harbour.

Apparently, garden buffs on Bainbridge Island don't know how to keep a secret.

— Elizabeth Hansen, photography by Adams/Hansen Stock Photos