

SUMMER BLOSSOMS

at Powell Gardens



Article and Photography Claire M. Caterer

WHEN was the last time you looked a Tyrannosaurus Rex in the eye, stood as still as a mountain while a Blue Morpho butterfly lit on your shoulder or tasted produce from a 2,000-acre mini farm? You can do all these things—as well as drink in hundreds of green and flowering species—at Powell Gardens this month. The botanical garden in Kingsville, Mo., is just 20 miles east of Lee's Summit and offers one of the most delightful day trips from the metro area.

This artfully designed landscape has been cared for by staff and volunteers since it opened in 1988. Today it consists of several themed plantings as well as the new Heartland Harvest Garden, which Powell proclaims is the nation's "largest edible landscape."

If you've never visited this treasure, August is the month to go. Powell's Jurassic Gardens exhibit is winding up—the last day is August 14—and the first two weekends of the month the annual Butterfly Festival takes place. And of course, produce is ripening like mad in the Harvest Heartland Garden, where you can sample and buy all sorts of seasonal fruits and vegetables.

FESTIVAL OF THE BUTTERFLIES

Powell Gardens is fun to visit any time of year, but August offers the truly spectacular Butterfly Festival (August 5–7 and 12–14). This event isn't about watching a few extra monarchs flutter around the outdoor exhibits. Instead, visitors step inside the conservatory, a tented hothouse filled with tropical plants and hundreds of free-flying rare butterflies at hand's reach. Guides stand by to describe the insects and to keep them safely enclosed. Only a few guests are allowed in at a time, so lines can be long and hot. The best time to arrive is first thing in the morning or late afternoon. Related exhibits include crafts and activities for kids as well as the chance to view various life stages of the butterfly. As always, the goal is learning, so the Visitor Education Center has lots of information about the various species on display.

Powell Gardens ~ 1609 N.W. U.S. Highway 50 ~ Kingsville, MO ~ 816.697.2600

Open 9 a.m.–6 p.m. through September; till 5 p.m. fall & winter

Admission: \$4 ages 5–12; \$9.50 ages 12 and up; \$8.50 seniors; slightly more during festivals



JURASSIC GARDENS

Scattered throughout Powell's landscape this summer are Guy Darrough's life-size sculptures of dinosaurs in their "natural" habitat. You'll find more than a dozen perched on bluffs in the woods, tending their eggs in the meadow or skimming the surface of the pools. Read about them on the informative plaques poised in front of each one. Kids will enjoy discovering fossils in the paleontology dig and learning even more in the indoor lab. To get started, simply follow the painted dinosaur footprints along the sidewalk leading from the Visitor Center.

THE COLLECTIONS

The dino footprints also lead straight to one of Powell's highlights, the Island Garden, which extends into Powell Lake. A "living" rock wall, sprouting dozens of flowers and other plants, shelters the paths as they wind around quiet pools of water lilies arranged in a circular pattern.

Step across the bridge and head to your right down the path, following the lake's edge, and duck into the woods. The stream that feeds Powell Lake meanders through the trees, which offer a shaded walk through the Rock and Waterfall Garden. Just adjacent you can visit the perennial collection, where colorful red brick paths lead you among mounds of flowering plants.

To visit Powell's newest addition, the Heartland Harvest Garden, make your way back to the main building and head out to your left. The large interactive fountain (feel free to play if you don't mind a soaking) marks the entrance. Here you'll discover a variety of small collections that make up the vast sampling of edible plants. The humble potager (French for "ed-

ible"), at the near end, showcases a French country kitchen arrangement, including herbs and small vegetables. The greenhouses on either side exhibit tropicals from bananas to pineapples. From there, tour the mini apple, peach and pear orchards, where a dozen different varieties are ripening. Cascades of grapes trail down trellises in the nearby vineyard. Follow the path to find even more herbs, produce and even edible flowers throughout the Harvest Garden. Tasting stations along the way allow visitors to sample the current harvest, which is abundant this month. If you're still hungry, head for the silo at the far end for samples or a quick sandwich at Fresh, the outdoor café.

THE VISITOR EDUCATION CENTER

Arriving tourists tend to hurry right through the indoor center en route to see the flowers. But before heading back to the car, be sure to stop back inside and look around the Visitor Education Center. Here Powell offers classes, organized tours and often labs or exhibits that complement events like the Butterfly Festival and Jurassic Gardens. Also available here are informational guides and maps to the botanical gardens as well as to the three-mile Nature Trail, which is located on the west side of the property. Ask at the front desk for the trolley schedule. This tram provides a quick ride to the perennial collection on a regular basis during the summer months.

The gift shop has unique pottery and nature-themed items from gazing balls to wind chimes. For a delicious lunch, stop at Café Thyme, which serves sandwiches and salads featuring fresh local produce with an eye to healthful eating and reasonably sized portions. ☐

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