

10BEST

These gorgeous gardens across the U.S. are ready to transport you to faraway lands



NY Botanical Garden hosts cosmic Kusama exhibit

An new exhibit by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, postponed due to the pandemic last year, is now open at The New York Botanical Garden. "KUSAMA: Cosmic Nature" featuring the artists iconic polka dots and pumpkins runs through October 31, 2021. (April 13) AP

Big and small alike, public gardens can be naturally transformative, offering a close-to-the-earth, soulful respite to workaday life. These gardens feature more than just the familiar sensory delights; they also act as portals transporting you to faraway lands and ecosystems, many with plants and animals that are threatened by climate change, logging, mining and other human activities.

The conservation efforts of these gardens serve to protect these precious botanicals, and they may also inspire you to add the international destinations they reflect to your must-visit list.



Betty Ford Alpine Gardens - Himalayan and Silk Road gardens | Vail, Colorado



Betty Ford Alpine Gardens - Silk Road Garden Nick Courten

One of several alluring garden rooms at Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is dedicated to the Himalayas where, despite dramatically rough climatic conditions, an abundance of plants thrive. Colorado's alpine locale – with its dry summers, cool nights and prodigious winter snows – provides ideal growing conditions for these species.

Especially beloved by the botanically inclined is the national flower of Bhutan, the Himalayan blue poppy (each flower only lasts a few days). Himalayan gentians are also captivating with their deep azure-hued petals.

Adjacent to this garden, the Silk Road Garden is inspired by this legendary route linking Asia with Europe, where caravans carried not just silk but also tea, spices and flowers. The shiny granite boulders flecked with mica reference the showiness of the Silk Road.

Strolling from high to low elevation, you'll spy striking foxtail lilies with their blossoms atop six-foot-high stalks, and dwarf-like iris species with unexpected color patterns. It's almost like walking the ancient trade route.





Cleveland Botanical Garden - Costa Rica Glasshouse | Cleveland, Ohio



Cleveland Botanical Garden - Costa Rica Glasshouse *Holden Forests & Gardens*

You'll feel as if you've traveled to the tropics as you're enveloped by warm, moist air in this uniquely designed glasshouse where half is dedicated to [Costa Rica's tropical rainforest](#). A cascading waterfall attracts red-legged honeycreepers and blue ground doves that may take a dip in the pool.

As you amble, climbing to the deck of the walkway that hovers 100 feet above the tree canopy, you'll notice dangling aerial roots, as well as delicate orchids and spiky leafed bromeliads dripping from tree branches. Plump fruits hang from the avocado, banana, coffee and papaya trees. Vines show off the bright purple flowers of queen's wreath.

Your senses will be tantalized by the sweet fragrances that perfume the air, where butterflies – hundreds are released every day – flutter about, displaying vivid azure, lemon yellow and chartreuse colors.





The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens - Australian Garden | San Marino, California



Huntington Botanical Garden - Australian Garden The Huntington Library, Art Museum, And Botanical Gardens

With its dirt and gravel paths and dense tangles of plants, the naturalistic landscape of this [five-acre garden](#) evokes the wild Australian landscape, in dramatic contrast to the property's otherwise paved lanes and manicured lawns and flower beds.

You'll walk three-quarters of a mile (including a steep downhill) from the visitor entrance to find the Australian Garden, snuggled at the base of a hill. Among the 70-some eucalyptus species planted here, the endangered *Eucalyptus woodwardii* is graced with a lovely yellow bloom.

You'll also find 12 species of acacia – another Australian native – with colors ranging from yellow to cream. Unusual specimens abound, whether it's the kangaroo paw displaying fuzzy, brush-like red or yellow blossoms, or the aptly-named, brilliantly-hued spider flower with its tendril-like blooms.



San Francisco Botanical Garden - Andean Cloud Forest | San Francisco, California

Cloud forests, like those of the Andes Mountain Range stretching from Venezuela to Argentina, are magical habitats that exist along mountainous slopes, with hovering clouds that cool the land. Interestingly, fog-laden [San Francisco](#) is a perfect environment to grow these plants, thanks to the city's year-round cool, but mild, weather.

In this [garden](#), you'll revel at a soaring pair of Andean wax palms that stand some 65 feet tall. This is the world's tallest palm species, known to grow up to 200 feet. Roam the half-acre garden and you'll notice enchanting pinkish-lavender fuchsia flowers decorating the trees.

The sweet scent of angel's trumpet is both captivating and deceptive – the plant is poisonous. Other eye-catchers in this garden include the dramatically orange blossoms of passion vines, and the striking maroon blooms of the bomarea plant.



San Francisco Botanical Garden - Andean Cloud Forest
Saxon Holt / San Francisco Botanical Garden

Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden - Lin Lougheed Spiny Forest of Madagascar | Coral Gables, Florida



Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden - Lin Lougheed Spiny Forest of Madagascar *Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden*

Madagascar is home to a dizzying array of unfamiliar plants, and Fairchild's [spiny forest garden](#) features a variety of intriguing flora native to this unique ecosystem found in this island nation. These curious specimens thrive in South Florida, which sits along a similar latitude with Madagascar and also shares significant wet and dry seasons.

You'll marvel at the shapes of many of the botanicals, such as the many-armed octopus tree, and Pachypodium that's adorned with boldly-hued blossoms as well as a swollen base and thorny stems. And, of course, the much-photographed baobab trees are unmistakable: they appear to be growing upside down, with their barrel-shaped trunks and finger-like branches reaching for the sky.

Denver Botanic Gardens - South African Plaza and Steppe Garden | Denver, Colorado



Denver Botanical Garden - Steppe Garden *Denver Botanic Gardens*. © Scott Dressel-Martin

Both the [South African Plaza](#) and the [Steppe Garden](#) enwrap visitors in the diverse flora of a country that's home to some 10% of the world's plants. The South African Plaza is dazzling with its ice plants that create a vibrant carpet of pink blossoms. You'll also find scarlet-hued torch lilies and the orange flowers of the lion's ear – both of which are especially attractive to hummingbirds.

In the Steppe Garden, the South African section offers a window into an ecosystem (steppe) where the Drakensberg mountain range dominates a grassland and shrub-laden landscape with cold, dry winters and hot summers. Here, massive slabs of regionally-sourced Dakota sandstone is a nod to this topography, as are the odd plants that have adapted to the steppe's harsh climate, such as the stone-like Lithops and the pincushion plant with its hairy leaves.