

A Holiday Close to Home

We are told that what we need in a vacation is a complete change of scene to refresh our bodies and souls. If you can't cope with the vagaries of air travel or the expenses of cruising to exotic spots, go to Richmond and explore the Lewis Ginter Botanical garden. You will be in a different world!

It is a world class, and yes I've been to Kew. (In the interest of full disclosure: it was 1957 during a two-year tour in London; Kew had not yet recovered from the deprivations of WWII; I was pushing an American stroller designed to be folded into a car, not pushed across the greensward.)

Easily found at the corner of Lakeside Ave. and Hilliard Rd via I-64,95,295, the Ginter is open 9 to 5 every day except Thanksgiving, Dec. 24,24 and Jan.1. This family vacation place is enriched by a children's garden for exploration and fun with a tree house, water play, even international villages. For shoppers there is a shop with outstanding containers, garden accents, art works as well as toys and jewelry.

To make your holiday a daylong experience there is both a casual Garden Café and a Tea House where you can dine either inside or on the shaded porch. The forty acres of gardens make return visits a necessity: such beauty and not a weed in sight! And the plants are labeled so you can take notes.

One reason the views are so fascinating is that they have nourished the whole pound of seeds into sweeps of colorful perfection. Edging several of the beds was a short compact plant with twisted limey green foliage that was surprisingly a coleus, *C. solenoslemon* 'Snazzy'. The color of the small scrunched up leaves were a perfect foil for so many other plants, familiar to us but used in ways that gave them a fresh aspect. One was a fuchsia petunia with a narrow lime edge on the petals; others were a dwarf gomphrina with fat purple globes and a zinnia with a flat daisy face.

We enjoyed seeing unfamiliar plants as well. One was a native, but not met often, *Diervilla sessilifolia*, Southern bush honeysuckle, a thicket-forming shrub about 3 to 5 feet tall suitable for zones 5 to 8. One outstanding shrub, Mahonia, the Oregon grape holly, was at least six feet tall with huge falls of grape-purple berries. We rarely see the California lilac, *Ceanothus*, in our area, especially the pure blue species. The Ginter has *C. pallidus* 'Marie Limon' an upright to five feet, deciduous shrub with pale pink flowers that open from summer until fall. The zones given in the plant books are 8 to 10 but surely if it grows in Richmond's zone 7, it will grow here as well.

The fragrance of the rose garden will draw you closer and make you linger longer. Masses of color in hybrid teas, shrub roses, floribundas, grandifloras- all of them arranged so

you can study them up close and personal. You can't have them all of course and there are as many favorites as there are rose growers. The sheer quantity of cultivars introduced each year makes it hard to find out about one particular one, so it helps to see roses face to face.

One modern shrub rose caught my eye, R. 'Country Song'. The name Buck was on the label. Dr. Griffith Buck (1915-91) was professor of horticulture at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa from 1952 until 1985 and hybridized modern roses that could survive temperatures as low as 26 degrees below zero. His other goals were good disease resistance and repeat blooming. He was not interested in 'show' blooms but good dependable landscape plants. 'Country Song' is a lovely plant and the exquisite flower is a wavy-petaled apricot pink.

Currently, in the meadow at Ginter, is a production by sculptor Patrick Dougherty. His designs are called "Stickworks" and this newest one is a modest castle, large enough to enter and walk from room to room. Although made of thin branches stripped of their leaves, it is not flimsy, with sapling sized timber providing support. It will remain until time removes it, a whimsical work of art, emphasis on the work!

The Conservatory at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden is the only classical domed conservatory of its kind in the Mid-Atlantic US. It has a central dome house and three wings housing a wealth of tropical plants including 200 orchids. One wing is currently featuring an English cottage garden complete with cottage.

For those of us who love figures, the conservatory has 20,000 sq. ft. of glass, 10,000 sq. ft. of display area and more than 200 cubic yards of soil is used: the soil a custom mix designed for root stability and drainage. To conserve energy in winter only the root zones are heated by circulating hot water in rubber hoses. To find out more: www.lewisginter.org.