

The Botanic Garden of the University of Bologna

Umberto Mossetti

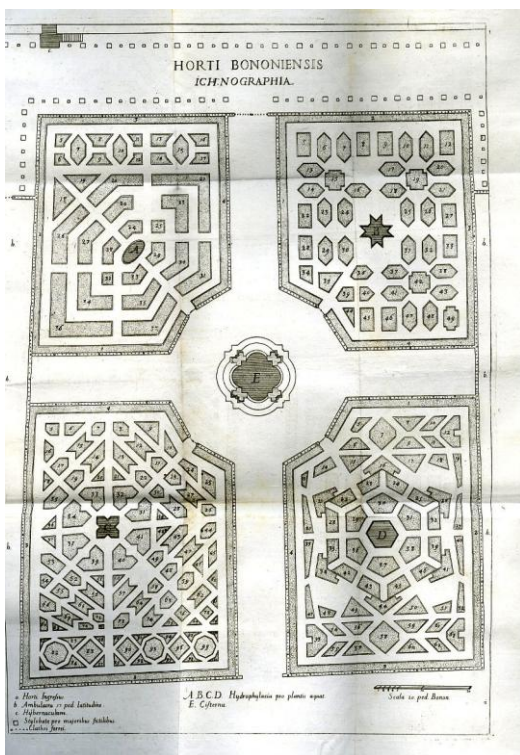


The Front Garden and the buildings of the Biology Department

The History

The origin of the Botanic Garden of Bologna is strictly connected with the early development of Botany in Italy. Indeed, ever since the sixteenth century, the University of Bologna was one of the main centres of botanical knowledge. Luca Ghini (1490-1556) was the first to hold the chair of Botany, and his tasks in Bologna were both lectures and practical demonstrations on plants. Ghini required suitable material for these practical demonstrations, and therefore asked the local Civic Senate for a place in which to grow his “herbs”. Owing to the Senate’s indifference and to his low salary, Ghini was compelled to accept a good offer from the Grand Duke of

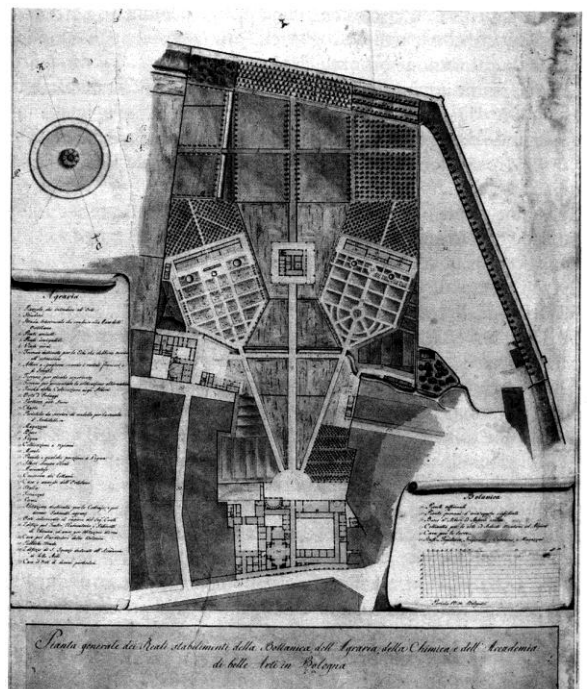
Tuscany. He therefore moved to Pisa, where he founded, in 1544, the Botanic Garden of that city. After the departure of Luca Ghini from Bologna, one of his pupils, Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1650), succeeded him. Aldrovandi was successful where Ghini had failed. Thus, in 1568, he obtained from the Senate the permission to create the Botanic Garden, which he himself directed for 38 years, until his death. The original site of the Botanic Garden was in the city centre, in the courtyard of the Public Palace near the hall where Aldrovandi gave his lectures. This site was the first of a series of so-called “botanic courtyards” that in many other cities have remained as such, confined in narrow spaces.



*The Botanic Garden in 1568. Engraving from MONTI GAETANO, *Indices botanici et materiae medicae...*, Bononiae ex typographia laelii a Vulpe, 1753*

Even in Aldrovandi's times, the Botanic Garden was not only a simple collection of medicinal herbs; thanks to the naturalistic interests of its founder, Aldrovandi's collection also included many exotic specimens collected by him personally, or obtained from correspondents. Consequently, the courtyard of the Public Palace soon became inadequate to host such a Garden, and in 1587 it was transferred to a larger site named "Borghetto San Giuliano" next to the present-day Porta Santo Stefano. Because of the considerable distance from the place where lectures were held, part of the specimens was brought back to their original location in order to carry out the "*ostensiones*" (practical demonstrations). It was only in 1740, under Giuseppe Monti's (1682-1760) direction, that the Garden was definitively transferred from its original courtyard location to the broader site near Porta Santo Stefano. There, in 1745, a "hybernaculum" was built in which exotic plants were kept during the coldest months of the year. The establishment of a special exotic section reflected both the new tasks assigned to botanic gardens and the new physiognomy they came to have during the 18th century.

Finally, in 1803-1804 Giosué Scannagatta (1773-1823) established a new site for the Botanic Garden in a larger area, which was also the nucleus of the new University area (right). Under his direction, the Botanic Garden of Bologna finally came to occupy the site that, more than two centuries later, it still occupies today.



The plan for the Botanic Garden in the new university area

The Botanic Garden today



The collection of succulent plants

The main elements underlying the structure of the Botanic Garden are single collections of high value and the reconstruction of natural habitats. With regard to the collections, the most noteworthy one is that of succulent plants.

It is one of the largest in Italy, and was created in the first half of the 20th century thanks to the efforts of Giuseppe Lodi, professor of Botany. Two other glasshouses contain tropical plants, amongst which some beautiful epiphytic orchids, and several European and exotic carnivorous plants (the tropical glasshouse, right).



Outdoors, the front part of the Garden is partially ornamental but also hosts numerous trees and bushes of scientific and educational value. The larger portion of the Garden, extending back from the buildings of the Biology Dept. to the bastions of the



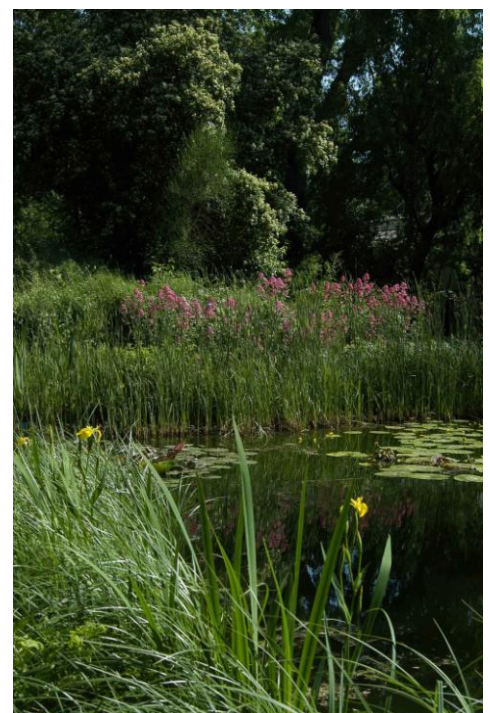
city walls, is dedicated to the reconstruction of natural habitats; it also hosts the area dedicated to medicinal plants (a reconstruction of Aldrovandi's "Garden of Simples"), two artificial ponds with aquatic plants, and a wood consisting mainly of broadleaf species of temperate climates. Next to a pond with the vegetation typical of swamps and marshes (below left), a habitat corresponding to the submerged forest of the plain of the river Po has been established. Along the bastions several other vegetational groups are present: Mediterranean plants of hot and arid zones, species from the forests of warm, low-altitude Apennine regions, and those from the cooler mountain areas (beech grove).

Garden of Simples, *Digitalis purpurea* L.



Autumn colours in the Arboretum

Specimens of high-altitude mountain flora and of the typical gypsum outcrops of the hills surrounding Bologna ("Gessi bolognesi") are currently being planted as well. The main part of the garden is occupied by the Arboretum, which characterises the Garden in the different seasons.



Reconstruction of natural habitats: the pond



The Arboretum in spring

Activities

The functions of the Botanic Garden are mainly educational, and therefore directed to school children and University students, but also to the public. In recent years, however, the garden has been increasingly involved in research activities, which encompass the entire spectrum of



Dictamnus albus L.

plant biology, from phenology to systematics, and from physiology to ecology. Its most recent activity is in the European LIFE+ project *PP-ICON/Plant-Pollinator Integrated CONservation approach: a demonstrative proposal* (LIFE09 NAT/IT/000212), which will focus on the conservation of a locally rare plant (*Dictamnus albus* L.) and the community of its natural pollinators. Seeds of *D. albus* and of nectariferous species will be collected, sown and cultivated at the Botanic Garden in order to obtain adult individuals available for planting in a natural ecosystem, with favourable repercussions on ecosystem health through the restoration of plant-pollinator equilibrium.

Visitor information

Botanic Garden of the University

Via Irnerio 42

I-40126 Bologna

The Botanic Garden is open to the public:

Monday – Friday: 8.00 to 15.00

(April-October: extended hours until 17.00 are possible but not guaranteed)

Saturday: 8.00 to 13.00

Closed on Sunday and Holiday

Admission to the Garden is free

The Garden is partially wheelchair accessible

Contacts

Tel +39 051209 1280

+39 051209 1299 (Didactic Room)

+39 051209 1297 (Gardeners)

+39 051209 1325 (Curator)

Fax +39 051242576

www.sma.unibo.it/ortobotanico

Director:

Dr. Anna Letizia Zanotti

annaletizia.zanotti@unibo.it

Curator:

dr. Umberto Mossetti

umberto.mossetti@unibo.it