

The Botanical Garden Graz

By Christian Berg

History

In the year 1811, after the war with Napoleon, Austria's economy and education was in ruins. In this year the Archduke Johann founded a Styrian research museum surrounded by a Botanical Garden for "teaching the art of plant breeding" and "providing useful plants". The Joanneum Garden was the core of Styria's successful fruit and wine production that we have today. Documents from 1843 show around 8,000 different species in the Garden at this time. Then after a few decades, during the 19th century, Graz was becoming a fast growing city. With the Botanical Garden in the heart of Graz, it was a nuisance for the city's expansion, so an alternative place for the garden was necessary. The new location of the Garden was chosen in the vicinity of the University, where an aspiring botanical laboratory already existed. Here, between the years 1888 and 1889 the University Garden was established with a modern greenhouse. The majority of the tropical plants and some trees from the Joanneum Garden were moved in 1889 to the new University Garden, thus leaving the old Garden to be quickly covered by buildings. A few of the trees and greenhouse plants from the old Garden are still alive today.



Efforts to expand the Garden failed, so the area still remains under three hectares. Two research and teaching institutes were built in the early 20th century. During the 1980s, the old greenhouse needed to be restored, but the Government decided to build a new greenhouse instead, as a highlight of modern architecture. It was opened in the year 1995. Since the empty greenhouse was deteriorating, in 2008 it was taken under memorial protection as an example for the modern steel and glass construction in the late 19th century. With our Garden today, you can see 100 years of greenhouse architecture.

The Garden Today

Today the Garden contains about 7,400 different species of plants. The outdoor area is dominated by the Arboretum with about 240 different trees and 540 shrub species. Graz is located between the Plant Hardiness Zone 5 (The Alps) and Zone 7 (Illyric deciduous wood area), so a few moderate frost sensitive woody plants like *Araucaria araucana*, *Carya illinoensis*, *Liquidambar orientalis*, *Paliurus spina-christi*, *Albizia julibrissin* or *Stewartia pseudocamellia* have been growing outside since a couple of winters.

Other parts of the Garden include the Alpine Rocky Garden, the Garden of Mediterranean Plants, the Garden of Medical Plants, and a traditional Farmer's Garden.



Pulsatilla halleri subsp. *Styriac*

The new greenhouses are without a doubt the most important landmark of our Garden. The architecture with parabolas as the basic design element is as spectacular as it is difficult to handle. The greenhouse is subdivided in three parts; a tropical house with an equatorial climate, a subtropical house with both a monsoon and desert climate, and finally a Mediterranean house with a winter rainfall climate. All plants are planted in the ground of 1,570 m² according to the plant geographical and ecological aspects. Hanging catwalks allow people to walk between the canopies of our tropical trees. So visitors get some of the natural impression of typical vegetation types around the earth.



Hanging catwalks between the canopies of our tropical trees

Activities in the Garden

Botanical research, teaching, and public education are the main activities in our Garden. The Garden harbors a great collection of South African Hyacinthaceae as a field of taxonomic research. Graz has published an Index Seminum consistently since the beginning. In 2009 we started to establish a long term Seed Bank of Styrian wild plants, the first in Austria of its kind. We also offer living plant material for teaching in Biology and Pharmacy.



Spring flowers in the Arboretum

About 2,000 people a year use the possibility of our guided tours through the Garden and the greenhouses. The visitors to our Garden are substantially increasing each year. In 2009 a new visitor information system was introduced. It is based on presentation boards, which allows the visitors to inform themselves about the different aspects of the Botanical Garden. We offer exhibitions around the topics of Botany, Ecology and Nature Conservation, located in the greenhouse information room. Furthermore, the Garden is widely known as a location for art exhibitions. A lot of the organization put into our Garden is thanks to the Society of Friends of the Botanical Garden Graz.



Art in the Arboretum

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Opening hours:
Outdoor area 8:00-15:00 h (15th May to 15th September 8:00-17:00 h).
Greenhouses 10:00–14:00 h (24th December–6th January closed)
Entry to the Garden and the greenhouses is free.



Aerial view of the new greenhouses, opened 1995