

## Jardin des Plantes de Montpellier

The Botanic Garden in Montpellier, *Jardin des Plantes*, is one of the University's treasures. The common history of University and Garden has linked them for over four centuries and also points to their common purpose, the safeguarding of all living things: the human being through medicine, the world of plants through the natural medical history.

### The First Botanic Garden of Medicinal Plants

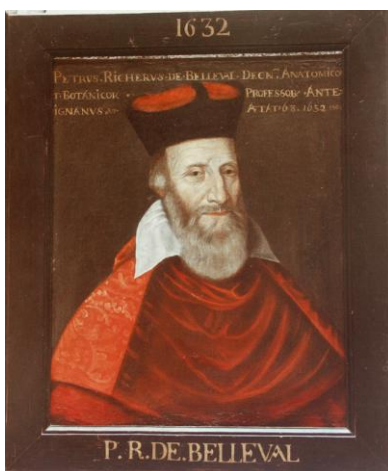
The School of Health in Salerno, the "Hippocratic city", in Southern Italy was the first in Europe. Its garden was created in 1309 to train future medical doctors and pharmacists. Several other cities throughout the Italian peninsula followed their example.

In the Middle Ages Montpellier was a rich city due to its position between the sea and the mountains on one of the important trade routes. The *speciadors sovereigns* based their fortunes on the booming trade with the East.

There were many doctors and pharmacists and the art of healing developed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and in particular with the use of medicinal plants. A medical school was founded in 1220 for the specific purpose of training medical doctors, and it remains the oldest school to this day in the Western world.

The Renaissance produced one of the foremost medical doctors and most learned naturalist, Guillaume Rondelet. In 1550 the *Arrêt des Grands Jours de Béziers* (Act of Parliament) put him in charge of the first structured botanic studies programme in France and entrusted him with the collection of plants *in natura*. The first garden, a *hortulus*, was established on his instructions at the Old School in the Cannau district.

### From Royal Garden to Jardin des Plantes



Two patent letters from King Henri IV led to the foundation of the Royal Garden on 8 December 1593 under the auspices of the Chair of Anatomy and Botanic Sciences. The founding father, Pierre Richer de Belleval consecrated his life to its care and development, twice even as he had to reconstruct the garden after the siege of Montpellier in 1622 (Montpellier was a Huguenot city). The present *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris benefitted from this destruction during the civil war, but it was not opened until 1635 and Richer's garden is therefore recognised as the oldest in France.

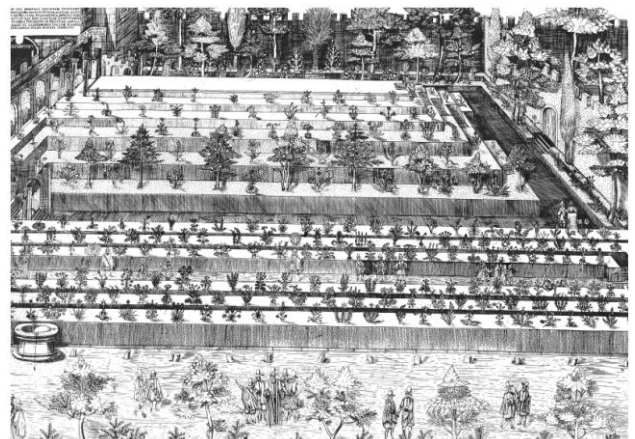
It consisted of six broad parallel raised beds to facilitate education and training. On the wall an inscription indicates the use of the sector: *Plantae quarum in medicina his temporibus maxime usus*.

Portrait of Pierre Richer de Belleval

The 1322 plants were listed in a catalogue: medicinal, aromatic and culinary plants. The Latin names were widely used there, a practice which was spreading. The students would also practice on a small oblong artificial hill called the *monticulus*, made up of successive terraces where plants were cultivated in accordance with their ecological characteristics, a first in the history of botanical sciences.

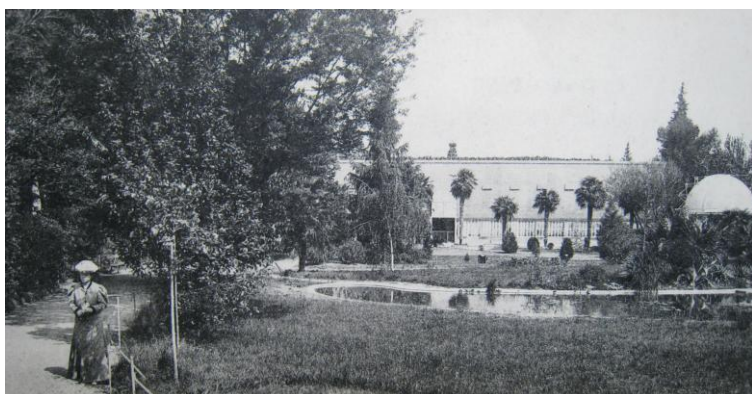
Visitors could admire exotic plants in an enclosure and an interesting labyrinth where one avenue would lead right to the water table.

Montpellier became the capital of botanical sciences in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Pierre Magnol was one of the great botanists of his age and revolutionised botanical science in his search for a natural classification system. Rondelet and Magnol had students from all over France, but also from most of the Western part of Europe, among them Charles de l'Ecluse, Félix Platter; Konrad Gessner, Mathias De Lobel, who spread their ideas and developed them further. The concept of "family" was developed by Michel Adanson, a student from Paris, and led directly to the numerical classifications of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Richer's Garden around 1600

François Boissier was the Intendant of the garden from 1740 to 1758, replacing the royal intendant. He organised the second major restoration after Magnol and showed himself to be a gifted 'gardener'. Several naturalists perfected their training and knowledge in Montpellier in the 18<sup>th</sup> century while the royal garden in Paris became increasingly prominent. Some of them even became famous, e.g. Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, Phillibert Commerson and Bernard de Jussieu.



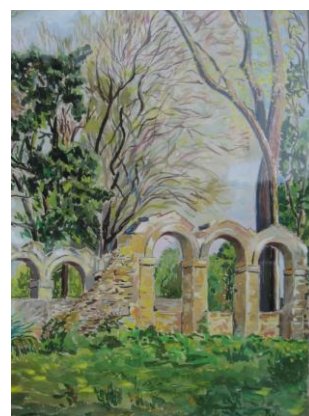
*The English Garden around 1890*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Chair of Botanical Sciences and the Jardin des Plantes, a title introduced by the act of devolution of 1795, experienced a second youth with several medical naturalists, e.g. Auguste Brousset, who unfortunately died at too early an age; Augustin Pyramus De Candolle, whose written work is considerable; Alire Raffeneau-Delile, who explored the Egyptian flora; and Jules Emile Planchon, who identified the phylloxera louse and saved the vineyards.

The Jardin des Plantes has been extended on several occasions (1810, 1860 and 1890) and has been embellished by an orangery (1804), an arboretum (1810), a landscaped garden around a large pool, the Martins greenhouses (1860) and a small observatory (1879). In 1840 the garden was officially opened to the public via the grand and solemn south gate.

The past century has witnessed the third large renovation, under the auspices of Hervé Harant, and has enjoyed a long and tranquil life. The romantic charm of the garden has seduced writers and poets alike, e.g. Paul Valéry, André Gide and Valéry Larbaud.

The Jardin des Plantes remains a protected site under the Ministry of the Environment (1982) and a historic monument under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (1992).



*The southern noria.  
Water colour from around 1960*

## Visiting the Jardin Des Plantes



*General view from the entrance*

The garden holds a botanic collection of about 3000 species *in situ* and 500 in the greenhouses. There are about 560 wooded plants, and the garden also holds some of the notable monuments from the history of the garden and the city: masonry relics from the Renaissance; the "Richer mountain"; the systematic school; an important collection of busts of the famous medical naturalists from Montpellier; the Rabelais monument; the "Tomb of Narcissa"; the southern noria; and the oldest astronomical dome in Mediterranean Languedoc. Students and school pupils come to the garden, but also amateur flora enthusiasts and tourists, often from abroad, in total around 130,000 visitors per year.

## Richer's Mountain

'Richer's mountain' is about 140 meter long and forms the habitat of plants from dunes, heaths and climatic climax forests around Montpellier. On the top of the hill the visitor will see a phillyria, perhaps the oldest in France; its entrance in the books reads as the "letter box for lovers", and it has since become a "wish tree". At the furthest west end a Judas tree will attract attention with its multiple branches. It was planted by the founder of the Jardin des Plantes. It is no longer possible to see the medicinal garden lower down the



“mountain” below the avenue of large Tuscan cypresses, only some engraved stones remain now lodged in the southern noria folly.

### The Systematic School



This formed the heart of the garden in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries according to a design from 1750. It is protected from the mistral by the beautiful La Gardette orangery from 1804 and has four beds of which two are dedicated to plants from the Mediterranean bio-climate, another to medicinal plants and the last is laid out as a kitchen garden. A beautiful ornament to this area is the male Ginkgo planted in 1795 and grafted with female branches in 1830. The School is surrounded by fifteen busts of eminent naturalists who have all worked here.

*The Orangerie and the systematic school*

Close by the hillock with the ancient southern noria also holds the tomb of Narcissa under a vault, a fabrication of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century dedicated to the daughter-in-law of the English poet Edward Young, *Placandis Narcissae Manibus*.

### The Landscaped Garden

It was established in 1860 when English gardens were the height of fashion. At its centre is a large pool in which the sacred lotus or the *nelumbo* flourishes with splendid flowers appearing in the middle of summer. Large Japanese carps and aquatic tortoises glide around the lotus plants. Next to the small observatory the Martins greenhouse hosts a collection of cacti and succulents. The greenhouse has been restored on several occasions.

De Candolle set up a national fruit tree and vine nursery on the land acquired by the garden in 1810 thanks to a grant from the Ministry. The Australian wine stocks are derived from vines cultivated in Montpellier.

For the time being this area is occupied by a bamboo grove, the northern noria, the bed with a large liquidambar, a collection of Solanaceae (in memory of Félix Dunal who was an expert on this plant family), a small Moroccan garden and the rock garden. The most remarkable tree in this sector is the Tassili cypress which is about to become extinct in the Sahara. The way in which it reproduces, by male parthenogenesis apomixis, fascinates biologists.



*The English Garden today*



## The Arboretum

The creation of the “forest school” took place in 1810, but there are no trees remaining from this period except perhaps the oak with chestnut leaves (1817?). Two of the trees were introduced by Raffeneau-Delile, the Osage-orange or Horse-apple with its covered trunk (1822) and the Pecan (1830). Visitors can contemplate a number of interesting species such as maples, zelkovas, gleditsias, a camphor tree, a juniper and a Chinese parasol tree, an olive tree more than 250 years old, moved here from Toledo ...

## Some Exceptional Plants



*The Ginkgo planted in 1795*



*The nelumbo, grown from roots collected in Egypt during the Bonaparte expedition*



*The Tassili cypress*

## The Rabelais Monument



Before the First World War this monument was erected in front of the medical students' union on the Esplanade. It was only installed in the garden on the occasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> centenary of the Faculty of Medicine at a memorable festivity. The low relief evokes the first work written by the man who was to become the now well-known literary giant in France, *La morale comédie de celui qui a épousé une femme mute*, written while he studied in Montpellier. This commemoration of an illustrious graduate of the School became a symbol to associate with the history of medicine, born of the Middle Ages in a city dedicated to the commerce of spices, the brilliant result of the Renaissance sciences and the period between two wars, full of hope towards the end of a century which turned out to be terribly eventful.

*7<sup>th</sup> Centenary Monument*

### Direction du Jardin des Plantes

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Tél. : 04.67.63.43.22  
Fax. : 04.67.04.06.76

### Opening hours:

In summer: from 1 June to 30 September – Tuesday to Sunday 12-20  
In winter: from 1 October to 31 May – 12-18  
Entrance is free of charge

Guided visits (in French and/or English) can only be arranged by written request at the latest one month in advance. There is a form on the web site of the Jardin des Plantes to fill in by anyone who wishes to have a guided group visit. There are no guided visits in July and August

[http://www.univ-montp1.fr/histoire\\_et\\_patrimoine/jardin\\_des\\_plantes/accueil\\_du\\_public](http://www.univ-montp1.fr/histoire_et_patrimoine/jardin_des_plantes/accueil_du_public)