

University of Turku Botanical Garden, Ruissalo

Centre for Research, Education, Conservation and Recreation

Historical perspective

The present University Botanical Garden was at first founded in 1924 on the estate of Iso-Heikkilä close to city centre. The site proved soon inadequate and in 1956 the Garden was moved (actually re-founded) to the present site on Ruissalo Island, c. 9 km from the city. The soil is originally of old sea bottom and characterized by compact clay, which as such is not very suitable for gardening purposes and has caused much additional labour for improving it. Also the groundwater level is pretty high, which has caused problems for some woody plants. The height of the soil surface is only some meters above the sea level.



The Garden in Iso-Heikkilä, the greenhouse (left), the gardener's house right) in 1955/56)

The area, which originally consisted of oak woods and cultivated fields, was first ca. 7 ha and the greenhouses covered about 700m². Expansion took place in 1972 to include the new glasshouse for mainly tropical and subtropical trees and climbers. Also the area was extended in two stages being now ca. 23 ha.

Quite a new era began in 1998, when all greenhouses were replaced by new ones with modern technologies, partly with double glasses, automatic operation and controlling systems. The building has been designed by local architect office Jarmo Saarinen.



The current greenhouses (1998)

Though not old on the current site, the Garden is now the active one in the historical chain of at least five past academic gardens or experiment plantations in Turku and vicinity since the first one already in 1678. This particular garden was a start for the subsequent botanical garden in Helsinki, where the then university was moved to after the big town fire in Turku 1827.

The old history of these gardens obliges the Garden to respect local horticultural heritage. Besides, the Garden, bordering protected NATURA 2000 areas, is part of Ruissalo's semi wild cultural landscape.

Activities and prospects

The main building complex includes six showing rooms open to visitors, consisting of Old and New World tropics in the middle, and cooler houses (subtropical *Araucaria* and Mediterranean ones) towards the gables, where succulent house and winter garden, respectively, situate.



Mediterranean climate house

There are also up-to-date laboratory and working room facilities for plant and animal research. The same building includes also service and administration spaces as well as lecture room for small events and exhibitions. All this covers about 2800 m². A small, separate aviary serves for bird ecology.

Most common research activities are ecological and plant physiological ones dealing often with relationships between plants, animals (mainly insects) and fungi.

In outdoor gardens the collections contain a larger arboretum (>1200 woody taxa) scattered all over the area having partly some tendency to main geographical areas. Separate living plant collections comprise of systematic and ornamental flower beds, perennial border, small rosary, rhododendron and peony hillock, rock garden terrace, fenced plot for useful plants. There are also aquatic plants at four ponds, of which one showing Oriental design.



Spring flowering in the arboretum



Magnolia sieboldii, a most hardy species in the genus



Cypripedium macranthos, native in E-Asia



Hybrid of *Anemone nemorosa* and *A. ranunculoides*

In the greenhouses there are over 2000 different species and cultivars and in outdoor gardens about 3000 ones. In recent years the Garden has received yearly about 40 000 visitors in all, the greenhouses about 15 000. Most of the everyday costs are covered by sales of tickets to greenhouses, guiding, souvenirs, etc. However, the salaries of the permanent staff (ca. 11 persons) and costs of maintaining the building are provided by the University.

The Garden co-operates at national and international level. Finnish botanical gardens tend to have an annual meeting mainly for exchanging information and planning co-operation. The Garden publishes seed catalogue (Index Seminum) every second year and has mutual seed exchange with ca. 400 different botanical gardens and institutions worldwide. The garden is also a member in the organisation of Botanical Gardens Conservation International, which co-ordinates plant conservation work at global level. The Garden belongs also to the network of Botanic Gardens in the Baltic Sea Region.



Heliconia rostrata in the New World tropic house

One of the most remarkable activities at the moment is to plot collection plants, trees and shrubs outdoors in the first place. This is linked to the renewal of plant data base system, which is at the finishing design phase. As a result there will be a plant data manager, which links together many operative options like searching, reporting, editing and map print-out properties with different scales at www-environment.fi. This will serve both professionals and great public. Next phase will be to produce plant picture material and to link it into the system. Then it will be a plant information bank of the living collection.

Contact information

The Garden is part of the Biodiversity Unit.

The Greenhouses are daily open to the public 11-17. Please, check the exceptions on our web-page.

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