

The University of Granada's Botanic Gardens

Amongst the University of Granada's rich collections are to be found two very different Botanic Gardens.

The first is the historic garden, located in the city centre, founded essentially as a complement to the university teaching of Medicine and Pharmacy, but also to satisfy the desire of the city of Granada to have a botanical garden, as was customary in the nineteenth century.



The second is the Sierra Nevada botanic garden, situated 2,500m above sea level, and designed according to the early twentieth century trend of building gardens in situ to study and display the rich flora of the mountains. Both were designed to promote scientific endeavour and be at the forefront of their times.

These two gardens lived initial periods of great activity and splendour, but then fell into oblivion. Recently, the University has undertaken to recover and restore them, thus allowing us to understand two essential stages in the history of Spanish science.

A 19th century botanic garden

As a consequence of state policy inherited from the Enlightenment, there was a proliferation of botanic gardens in Spain. Every "provincial" city had or wanted to have its very own botanic garden in some shape or form. Those surviving today are of two kinds: the great botanic gardens established in the 18th century (Madrid, Valencia or La Orotava in the Canary Islands), and those established throughout the 20th century. Most of the gardens, which were small and located in city centres, disappeared or have been substantially transformed, and have little resemblance to their original size or layout.

The peculiarity of the University of Granada's historical botanic garden is that it conserves today practically all its original area from the mid 19th century and, more importantly, conserves the layout from its initial period, making it an unusual example indeed. So it is a rare example in Spain of what old botanic gardens linked to educational institutions (universities and high schools) were like in provincial cities, and reflects the birth and growth of Botany as a modern science.



The decision to establish it was taken at the end of the 18th century to make use of the garden of the College of St Paul, previously belonging to the Company of Jesus, but



which had become university property after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and the subsequent seizing of their property by the State. However, after decades of debate and obstacles, its actual coming into existence coincided with the introduction of studies in Pharmacy in 1850 and the appointment of the botanist Mariano del Amo y Mora as the Dean of the new Faculty.

The structure of the plantations is similar to that of many botanic gardens, with areas of "floriculture" in the terminology of the time, and collections of plants with different uses, amongst them of course medicinal use. However, the most interesting part of the layout is the Botanic School, where plants are organized according to taxonomical criteria; it is still divided today into 14 squares, corresponding to the 14 classes of the old Jussieu taxonomy (rectified by De Candolle). The plants which are currently grown there still fit into this original pattern, thus underlining the historical value of the garden.

The central garden path

The University has carried out extensive improvements and restoration work since 1998, made easier by the conservation of many of the original elements of the garden. The original external iron railings, recently restored (2011), a climber support from 1856 and several century-old trees: a pagoda tree, Canary Island pine, American persimmon, palm trees, including the most valuable of all, a ginkgo planted in 1889.

A mountain botanic garden 2,500m above sea level



Sierra Nevada has the greatest concentration of endemic plant species in western continental Europe. This has always made its flora the object of interest of the University's researchers, and in the early documents of the Botanic Garden reference is made to the presence of some of them in the city centre garden. But it became obvious that a high altitude mountain garden was needed, and the staff of the Faculty of Pharmacy filed a request to the Rector for such a garden to be established in 1937, near the university mountain hostel, opened in 1934 with, amongst other functions, that

of offering support for the study of nature. Various different activities began both beside the hostel and on the St Francis heights, off the beaten tracks, where signs reading "Experimental crops" can still be seen, dating from before the marking off of the current garden, which took place in 1965. This garden is therefore of great interest as one of the oldest mountain gardens in existence and is still today the highest.



Today's plantations recreate on a small scale the plant diversity of Sierra Nevada. They are divided into two areas corresponding to the calcareous and siliceous soils of these mountains. They are crossed by winding paths, hills with various ecosystems, stony areas, brush land, meadows and a tiny lake, allowing the visitor not only to see many of the Sierra's plants, but also to form an idea of how its plant cover behaves. Thus, the garden is designed not to be an autonomous entity, but to serve as an introduction to the mountain itself.

Contact details:



The 19th Century Botanic Garden is located at the Faculty of Law in central Granada

Visiting times:

Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm

For groups or guided visits, contact the Curator.

The Sierra Nevada Botanic Garden of the Cortijuela, on the Hill of the Trevenque within the National Park

Visiting times:

During the months of July and August Tuesday to Sunday from 10 am to 5pm.



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