

The garden of the two towers, a garden inspired by medieval time

Citadel of Namur- Route Merveilleuse – Entrance near the “Tour Joyeuse “

Why a garden inspired by medieval times at the Citadel of Namur?

The historical environment and landscape of this south-facing spot, along with the wine-growing tradition connected with the sunny slopes of the Citadel, are elements that make this an ideal site for educational purposes. The embankment is set out in levels, recalling the traditional structure of medieval gardens, and to ensure total immersion, there are climbing vines, plateau pruning, hedges of interwoven stems, hurdles, raised crops, fountains, loveseats and colourful carpets of flowers.

The spirit of the garden

The Garden of the Two Towers is not a historical reproduction, but rather a collection of elements that help us imagine and better understand the art of gardens in the Middle Ages. There is no “standard” medieval garden. In fact, the spirit of the garden, the techniques and the landscaping style evolved over the course of a thousand years. Moreover, there are several types of medieval garden, such as the monastic garden, the castle garden and the town garden. Each of these has its own characteristics, its *raison d'être* and its constraints.

It also evokes the path that led to Saint-Jacques de Compostelle.

The garden of the two towers

This garden is designed around six themes :

The garden of welcome with its bower of vines

Two magical plants of witches and sorcerers mount guard before the door to the Garden of the Two Towers: sage, which saves from all evils and lady's mantle, the mythical plant of the alchemists. At the foot of the steps, verbena, poppies or hemlock recall the importance of magic in the Middle Ages. Cereal crops provided the staple diet. Wheat, oats, barley, spelt, rye and millet were grown, along with buckwheat. The most sought-after but also the most expensive beverage was wine. Vineyards developed in Gaul from Roman times. The first traces of winegrowing along the Meuse date back to the Merovingian period. Vines were planted on the slopes of the Meuse from Namur to Liège. Although the wealthy and the nobility preferred wine, ordinary people drank cider, barley beer or beer.

The viridarium, the cemetery orchard

In the monasteries, the orchard was often planted in the cemetery. The trees, placed between unobtrusive and sometimes even unnamed tombs, thus took on a powerful symbolism, plunging their roots into the kingdom of the dead while lifting their uppermost branches to heaven. The beehives that provided honey and wax were also set up in the orchard, which was carpeted with grass and meadow flowers.

The hortus, the garden of potherbs

The plants used for daily meals and in particular for the “pot”, the cauldron in which soups and hotpots made of potherbs were prepared, were grown in the vegetable garden. The crops were grown in raised rectangular or square trays. This practice promoted the heating of the soil, allowed good drainage and made growing easier. This part of the garden is surrounded by a hurdle of logs on which grow vines, blackberries and, further along, marrows.

The herbularius, the garden of simples

The Latin name, *Simplicis Medicinæ*, refers to remedies based on a single plant, and therefore considered simple. Over sixty species can be found in these beds, but many other plants in the garden also possess medicinal properties. Some plants have so many virtues that they are considered panaceas. Some of these can be found in this garden. One such plant is sage, which takes its name from the Latin *Salvare*, meaning to save, while another is absinth, which can be used to treat gout, disorders of the chest, the kidneys, the teeth and the ears, melancholia and problems of sight, as well as facilitating digestion, purging, strengthening the lungs and fortifying the heart!

Along the Way of Saint-Jacques

Throughout the Middle Ages, pilgrimages such as that of Saint-Jacques de Compostelle marked the history of the people in our regions, sending thousands of travellers out onto the road and leaving traces in our landscape. Upon arriving in the South, pilgrims from the North discovered different, typically Mediterranean vegetation. Along the shell-shaped path, a small foretaste of the garrigue or scrubland plunges us into the scents of the Mediterranean, with lavender, rosemary, thyme, oregano and laurel. Rockrose and jasmine with fragrant flowers, the fig tree and sea buckthorn flourish alongside the pistachio tree and the olive tree.

The garden of Mary

Although a garden of bouquets, a garden of flowers, it is as useful as it is symbolic. The flowers grown here will be used to adorn the altars but also decorate the garden in accordance with the liturgical festivals. The garden is surrounded by claustras, the symbol of chastity, evoking the enclosed garden. The roses here are among the oldest varieties known, such as "Four Seasons", "Great Maiden's Blush", "Tuscany" and the famous "Provins Rose". Each flower bears a significance that is often complex, varying depending on the context or the period. For instance, carnations are associated with redemption, with the Passion of Christ and the victory of sacred love in the divine world. Several flowerbeds scattered throughout the garden have been set out like a tapestry. Clumps of carnations, lychnis, strawberry plants, daisies and other flowers form patterns that are repeated regularly like the weft of a fabric.

The garden of courtly love

A place of pleasure and of meeting, this garden contains flowers with voluptuous scents, songbirds and delicious fruits. It welcomes knights and great ladies, poets and troubadours who whisper sweet nothings in flower-filled meadows. This garden includes raised banks adorned with pearlwort and loveseats set around a fountain in the midst of carpets of flowers. A place of delights, the garden appeals to the five senses, a recurrent theme in medieval imagery. The sight is filled with flowers and green lawn, the sense of smell with fragrances, taste with the fruits of the orchard. Water is an essential element in the courtly garden, symbolising life and fertility, a little like the fountain of youth.