

The Berry Garden

Chaussée de Dinant 1082 5100 WEPION
In the place called “Le Grand Pré“

The garden's spirit

Set up near the Strawberry Museum in Wepion, the 3,500 square metre Berry Garden is particularly well situated to offer an area for discovering one of the major assets of our gardens, that is, berries and other small fruits.

The purpose of this garden is to show a sample of the berries and small fruit-producing plants and shrubs that can be grown in our area along with the methods and practices for growing them successfully.

Tribute is paid first to a local speciality: Upon entering the garden, you are greeted by the strawberry garden. A special area is completely devoted to this queen of berries and its cultivation. It includes a history path and an area of “commercial farm-like cultivation” with intensive production varieties but also a whole range of old and special varieties.

The notion of berries and small fruits is defined and displayed in the host of plant beds that are laid out around the site. Species and varieties that grow in our area, ranging from the most conventional to the most amazing, from the most domesticated to the wildest, show the various aspects and great diversity of this world with a wealth of colours, tastes, and scents.

The collections' general layout is designed to be both educational and aesthetic to show the different technical aspects, such as the pruning and planting systems, whilst conserving the charm of a pleasure garden and a discovery stroll.

This garden has many purposes: It is both educational and conservational, but also a green tourism attraction and a place of demonstrations, walks, events, relaxation, discovery, and learning.

Scientific concept

It is not that simple to draw up criteria for defining berries precisely, even though we all have a general and quasi-instinctive idea of what the category comprises.

Whilst it is easy to put red currants, black currants, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, and other berries in this category, the situation is less cut-and-dry when it comes to nuts. Hazelnuts, which grow on shrubs, are included, whereas chestnuts, which grow on tall trees, are not.

In compiling the list of varieties in this garden, we decided to restrict it to the varieties of edible fruits that are borne on shrubs, climbing plants, and perennial or annual herbaceous plants that grow in our climes. Small fruits that grow on tall trees that are associated more with orchards, such as cherries and mirabelles, and beechnuts, for example, thus have not been included in the collections.

A wink is given to inedible decorative berries in the hedge that surrounds the nursery area to remind visitors that some berries can be poisonous.

The collection of exotic fruits contains foreign species that are hardy enough to survive in our area or grown as annuals, *e.g.*, physalis and litchi tomato (a.k.a. sticky nightshade).

The garden is divided into several different areas:

The entrance area

This space opens up onto several pathways that were designed so as to allow visitors to cover the entire garden without going through the same area twice. It is contiguous with the strawberry garden, which can thus be visited independently from the rest of the garden.

Strawberries

This area comprises a set of varieties showing the history of strawberry crosses, improvements made by horticultural selection techniques, and the diversity of varieties used in traditional and commercial operations. There is a bed of a selection of strawberry plants chosen to show their great diversity: early and late strawberries, red ones, white ones, yellow ones, and so on.

Kiwis and tara vines

Several varieties of kiwi and tara vine are cultivated along a pergola-lined path and around the entire perimeter of the strawberry garden. To show the fruit's variability in terms of both appearance and texture, green, yellow, and red fruit varieties have been planted.

Grape vines

Grape growing marked the history of the Meuse river valley down through the ages. Here grape vines are presented in three different cultivation schemes: grown on pergolas (overhead trellises), on "vertical contre-espaliers" (free-standing espaliers), and in "horizontal cordons". Some of the varieties were trained by two different methods: the Guyot simple trellis and the cordon de Royat system.

Red and black currants

This area shows the various forms taken by the genus *Ribes*, of the Grossulariaceae family: black currant, gooseberry, large-bunched red currant, and jostaberry bushes. This range lets visitors discover the colours, ripening periods, and different planting and cultivation systems used for these tart little berries.

Raspberries and blackberries

This plot illustrates the genus *Rubus*, with two main representatives: raspberries and blackberries. The visitor will discover a wide range of raspberry varieties (both climbing and non-climbing, bearing red, yellow, or white berries, and with different ripening periods) and blackberry bushes (humble briars!), as well as hybrids between these two species, such as loganberries and tayberries.

Exotic fruits

This part of the garden offers a concentration of foreign species such as the Mediterranean hackberry and strawberry tree (Mediterranean plants), paw-paw and aronia bush (American plants), and nashi (the Asian pear). An arbour has been set up at the heart of this garden to let you sit and relax as you breathe in the heady scents of such exotic small fruits and berries as the Physalis, litchi tomato, edible blue honeysuckle, and persimmon.

Acid-loving plants

European blueberry, European cranberry, and American cranberry bushes have been planted in beds of peat improved with an acid substrate. A rainwater recovery system has been set up near the arbour so that they can be watered with water of the proper pH.

The nursery

This plot, which is reserved for the city of Namur's Parks & Gardens Department, will serve as a specialized nursery and "storeroom" for the garden's collections. It is separated from the garden *per se* by a hedge of inedible and sometimes poisonous berry bushes such as cotoneasters, wax trees, spindle trees, and pyracanthas.

Breeders and/or new developments

This area is specially set aside for new horticultural developments and thematic plants that are the focus of a temporary exhibition or event. It is intended to showcase the dynamism of berry and small fruit horticulture and serve as an open door for collaboration with nursery owners and collectors wishing to show off their new creations and know-how.

Indigenous species

This broad belt running the length of the garden is devoted to indigenous species that either originated in Europe or have become perfectly naturalized here. The latter edge the belt to provide a transition between the European and exotic species.

A few edible wild species are presented in the form of collections on the "English lawn". These include elderberry trees, rowan trees, hazelnuts, persimmons, and other low trees.

Fig trees

The fig tree *Ficus carica* is a low tree ranging from 5 to 10 m that belongs to the Moraceae family. The genus *Ficus* boasts more than 600 species, including a number of our houseplants, such as *Ficus benjamina* or our famous “rubber plants”. Fig trees are true botanical curiosities. The selection shown here is based on varieties that resist cold (down to -15°C) well, but it is nevertheless necessary to choose very good exposure and protect the branches and trunk from winter’s onslaught. The fig tree does well in all types of well-drained soil, with a preference for those that warm up quickly.

**Design and establishment of the garden:
The non-profit association *Histoires de Plantes asbl*
The Municipal Engineering Office and Parks & Gardens Department**

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