

Garden Review

The National Herb Garden of the US National Arboretum

Debbie Moore Clark

April 21, 2001 was a warm, but comfortable day to visit the US National Arboretum, although many perennials were still underground in this Zone 7a location of Washington, DC. Nonetheless, the beauty of the garden was evident and many plants, whether evergreen or those enticed up by spring's early heat, filled the garden's extensive beds.

The National Arboretum is located in northeast Washington, D.C., off New York Avenue (Route 5) and Bladensburg Road. Like admission to the Arboretum, parking is free. The US National Arboretum is a US Department of Agriculture research and education facility and a living museum, dedicated to serving the public and improving our environment by developing and promoting improved floral and landscape plants and new technologies through scientific research, educational programs, display gardens, and germplasm conservation. A national center for public education, the Arboretum welcomes visitors in a stimulating and aesthetically pleasing environment. Moreover, it is ours—and it is beautiful and tranquil place to visit.

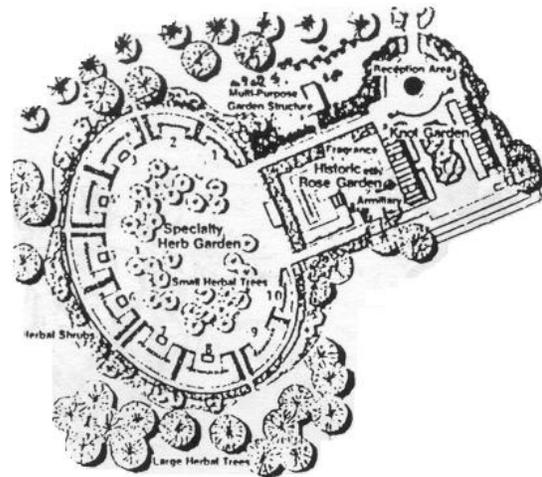
The US National Arboretum is made up of many collections—Asian, Azalea, Capitol Columns, Conifer, Dogwood, Friendship Garden, Holly and Magnolia, National Bonsai and Penjing Museum, National Boxwood, National Grove of State Trees, Native Plants, and Perennials—and one of my favorites, the National Herb Garden, the focus of this review.

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The Agricultural Research Service, an in-house research arm of the US Department of Agriculture, recommends June-July-August as the optimum time to view the herb garden when its many plantings grow in harmony with myriad colors, textures, and scents. This garden has been a joint project of the Herb Society of America and the Arboretum since 1965. In 1976, the Herb Society presented \$17,760 to the Department of Agriculture as a Bicentennial gift to begin the garden. The Herb Society then raised the majority of the contributed funds, and Congress appropriated matching funds for the garden. Construction began in 1979 and planting in 1980.

Consisting of three major sections—The Knot Garden, The Historic Rose Garden, and The Specialty Gardens—one may enjoy the Herb Garden at length, taking in the many facets of its beauty. This is no small garden. Covering about two acres, the Herb Garden is positioned in a meadow where plant material masses, changes in elevation, and trellises are used to separate, and at the same time, integrate the gardens. Within the gardens, plants are organized in strong patterns, with plantings along the edges loosely arranged to provide a transition from the gardens to the surrounding meadow. You may experience a virtual tour of the National Herb Garden: Plants for People at <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/herb.html>.

The Knot Garden utilizes classic elements, fashionable during the 16th century in England. Dwarf evergreens—cultivars of arborvitae, cypress, and holly—are used to create the intricate patterns of the knot. Their resins, barks, and needles have been used for medicinal or industrial purposes.



The Historic Rose Garden exhibits representatives of roses long used for medicine, perfume, food, and pleasure. The collection includes varieties of French, damask, alba, cabbage, China, and rugosa roses.

Ten Specialty Gardens make up the third garden, arranged along the perimeter of a grassy oval about 150 feet long. Inside the oval are small trees of herbal interest. Separated by boxwood hedges, each specialty garden is large enough to contain a collection of special plants for teaching and studying purposes. The Specialty Gardens include the Dioscorides' Garden, Dye Garden, Early American Garden, American Indian Garden, Plants in Medicine, Culinary Garden, Industrial Garden, Fragrance Garden, Oriental Garden, and Beverage Garden—each organizing its plantings around its primary usage.



Caption: Scanned image of the National Capitol Columns from a photograph taken by Dan F. Poyourow.

The National Capitol Columns were erected at the US National Arboretum in 1990 with private funds raised by the Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA). The Corinthian columns were carved in the 1820s and originally formed part of the east central portico of the US Capitol Building. Visible from many areas within the Arboretum, the National Capitol Columns make a dramatic backdrop to The Herb Garden.

For a virtual tour and detailed information about the total US National Arboretum experience, visit <http://www.usna.usda.gov/>. The National Herb Garden is only one small portion of a large and interesting arboretum.

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Debbie Moore Clark is an Extension Master Gardener with Mecklenburg County, NC, who loves to photograph plants and gardens. She and her husband Mack enjoy traveling and always visit one or more gardens when away from their home in Charlotte, NC.