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A COLLECTIVE VISION
TAKING FLIGHT IN A GLASS HOUSE

The glass walls and roofs of the Conservatory at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden form the envelope of a special building.

The exterior architecture is balanced, graceful and iconic, so it is not surprising that in a 2013 public survey conducted by the Virginia Center for Architecture, the Conservatory ranked 35th among the 100 most beloved architectural structures in the entire Commonwealth. On the inside, gorgeous plantings and naturalistic displays offset soaring columns and strong vertical and horizontal lines. The interior of the central dome leaps 40 feet above the tops of mature palm trees, in a spider web of glass and reflected light.

Yet, the remarkable building that is the Conservatory is also an extraordinary machine in ceaseless motion. Fans whir, pumps churn, furnaces ignite, vents open and close, mist systems spray to add humidity for plants or to cool guests, and shade cloths dance back and forth across the ceilings, holding in heat on a winter night, holding out the blistering rays of the sun on a summer afternoon.

Pilot and author Antoine de Saint Exupéry wrote of the early airplane: “The machine which at first blush seems a means of isolating man from the great problems of nature, actually plunges him more deeply into them.” And so it is with the soaring machine that is the Conservatory. It is not a building designed to insulate us from the natural world or even merely to house and contain it; it is a machine intent on carrying us deeper in and closer up, to orchids that thrive only near the equator, and shimmering butterflies that dance through the jungles of Indonesia or Central America. Many in the Richmond region cannot take a plane to these wonders readily, but their imaginations can take wing here.
A gift of the Gottwald family, the Conservatory was built in 2003.
Conservatory Horticulturist Ryan Olsen and Gardener Menaka Dewasinghe plant tropicals in the Conservatory Palm House. “All of the Conservatory’s ferns, orchids, spices and palms remind me of home,” said Dewasinghe. She finds pleasure in nurturing these plants and photographing her favorites, which she posts on social media for family and friends in Sri Lanka to enjoy.
Look into the future and there’s one thing we know for sure: it will be different. Change is inevitable.

As our world experiences rapid and often dramatic shifts, the role of botanical gardens continues to evolve. The first botanical gardens created in the 16th century were places to study medicinal plants. Throughout the 17th to 19th centuries, the interest changed to collecting and cultivating plants of economic importance. Today, our biggest concerns focus on social and environmental responsibility.

The modern call for botanical gardens is rooted in Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden’s mission: to connect people through plants to improve communities.

You can see this mission in action in the Conservatory where biodiversity is celebrated each and every day:

• Collections bridge cultures as guests marvel at plants from around the world and visitors from afar delight in recognizing flora from their homelands.

• Butterflies mesmerize schoolchildren, teaching lessons about the importance of pollinators in our interconnected world.

• Special conditions greatly expand what the Garden can grow and, perhaps one day, preserve, safeguarding vital genetics for future generations.

Our world and botanical gardens will continue to transition. It’s a good thing gardeners, by nature, are planners.

Visit bit.ly/GardenPLAN to read the Garden’s strategic plan.
1. **Palms (Areaceae):** Each species’ form varies, as climbers, shrubs, stemless plants or trees. Some flourish in rainforests, others in deserts. The tallest plants in the Conservatory Palm House are Manila Palms (*Adonidia merrillii*), native to the Philippines. In a nearby side bed is the Triangle Palm (*Neodypsis decaryi*), which gets its common name from overlapping triangular leaf bases (see photo detail.) This Madagascar native is somewhat new to cultivation.

2. **Orchids (Orchidaceae):** The largest flowering plant family is the orchid. Approximately 28,000 species exist, and new hybrids are continually developed. Blooming times vary per species, so when not blooming they are nurtured in a nearby greenhouse. Once ready to bloom, the orchids are transferred to the Conservatory for temporary display in the East Wing. (*Dendrobium ‘Airy Green’; pictured*).

3. **Aroids (Araceae):** A broad plant family, aroids range from common philodendrons, peace lilies and calla lilies to anthuriums (*Anthurium andraeanum ‘Miss June’; pictured*). An aroid is distinguished by its inflorescence, an elongated spike protected by a modified leaf. You may be familiar with some of these plants, but probably not at such large sizes; for instance our ‘Thailand Giant’ Elephant Ear (*Colocasia gigantea*) has 3-foot-wide leaves and is still growing!

4. **Cycads (Cycadaceae):** This primitive plant group evolved 300 million years ago, long before flowering plants. Cycads reproduce through cones, not flowers. The popular sago palm is a native to Southeast India and is not a palm; it is a cycad. A lofty, prized Queen Sago Palm (*Cycas circinalis; pictured*) grows in the Conservatory Palm House. It was a gift from the United States Botanic Garden when the Conservatory opened in 2003, and is notable for its size.

5. **Desert Plants (Xerophytes):** The Conservatory’s West Wing exhibits desert plants adapted for water and nutrient storage: fleshy succulents, spiny cacti and sprawling agaves such as Century Plant (*Agave americana; pictured*). A notable, but less showy, plant is *Calibanus hookeri* with grass-like foliage and a rounded protrusion (caudex) that resembles a turtle’s shell. This Mexico native is rarely seen in cultivation, but you can find it near the side exterior door of the West Wing.

6. **Bromeliads (Bromeliaceae):** This family is epiphytic, meaning it grows on other plants, often trees high in the canopy. It derives nutrients from air and rain. During the process, bromeliads help rid the air of harmful toxins, after which they emit pure oxygen. Native to Central and South America, bromeliads comprise one of Lewis Ginter’s core tropical collections (*Aechmea ‘Del Mar’; pictured*).
As a child, Arthur puttered alongside his parents in the family’s gardens. “I always enjoyed getting my feet in the soil,” he said with a smile. At age 15, Arthur landed his first job, which supported his first purchase: a plant. “I used those paltry wages from the drugstore to buy tall-bearded irises,” he recalled. The teen’s next acquisition was a pseudobulb of the nun’s orchid, followed by potted cattleyas advertised in “Flower Grower” magazine. “I didn’t know how to grow them, so I read and asked questions.” Apparently, lots of questions. Intellectual curiosity netted Arthur a teacher’s warning. “You will be tormented all your life with your insuppressible urge to overanalyze everything,” she told me. Well, that penchant earned me a DuPont Scholarship to UVA.” It also sparked a lifelong passion for orchids.

Following completion of a medical degree, Dr. Burke practiced medicine. He later worked as an assistant professor in pharmacology and thereafter, radiation therapy. At home, he began to obsessively build his orchid collection.

“I needed a place where the beauty of my flowers could be shared. A board member donated orchids to the garden, so I followed her lead” ... time and again.

Today, at age 92, Dr. Burke houses his remarkable orchid collection in three greenhouses on his Mechanicsville property. He has conducted 500 cattleya crosses, some national award winners. From seedlings to potted plants, Dr. Burke’s collection numbers around 3,000.

“Each orchid has very exacting needs, so growing them is an intellectual challenge,” Dr. Burke said. “As you grow them, they grow on you.”

As for the Conservatory, the bulk of the orchids stems from Dr. Burke’s generosity and their good fit with the Garden’s Collections Policy. He also established a trust fund to help support their care.

The irony is that Dr. Burke, who grew up in Ginter Park, was destined to build an orchid collection for a botanical garden of the same name: Lewis Ginter.

Watch for a related blog post about Art Burke, including some of his orchid growing tips at bit.l.ly/GARDENBLOG
“Each orchid has very exacting needs, so growing them is an intellectual challenge. As you grow them, they grow on you.”
A bird’s-eye view reveals the Conservatory’s location in the heart of the Garden. Photo by Harlow Chandler.
Play and Grow! This spring and summer the Garden is a vibrant canvas with interactive sculptures by six Virginia artists, innovative programming, multisensory activities and Pop-up Play Stations.

**A Monument to the Hero Inside of You**
*by Javier Chicho Lorenzo*
Originally from Madrid, Spain, Lorenzo has lived in Charlottesville for the last 12 years, filling the city’s walls with bright colors and bringing the community together through his art.

**Moon Bounce**
*by Mickael Broth*
Also known as The Night Owl, this Richmond-based artist, muralist and writer has a past as a graffiti artist.

**Trial and Aeros**
*by Keith M. Ramsey*
Richmond artist Ramsey explores subjects as sculptural works in a political context and uses personal expression through astrological and natural themes.

**Kaleidoscope**
*by Matthew Leavell*
Leavell is a Mobjack, Virginia-based sculptor known for his whimsical and vibrant metal creations.

**Morphing Perspectives**
*by Nico Cathcart*
A painter and muralist originally hailing from Toronto, Canada, Cathcart strives to discuss feminism, minority empowerment and conservation in her highly colorful works.

**PinToy Meditation Wall**
*by J-P. Müller*
Müller is an artist, engineer and fabricator trained in artistic industrial design, construction and custom fabrication.

Visit lewisginter.org to learn more.
PITCHER-PERFECT PLANTS

What’s so unique? The pitcher plant is a carnivore—or precisely, an insectivore. Rather than attempting to extract nutrients from the soil, the pitcher plant resourcefully traps its own food. The plant’s slippery mouth—a modified leaf resembling an elongated pitcher—attracts insects by scent or secretion. When the insect lands on this protrusion, it becomes captive. Stiff, downward-pointing hairs prevent its escape, and the captive slowly decomposes and supplies nutrients for the plant.

Don’t be deceived: The word “carnivorous” may bring to mind gruesome images, but pitcher plants are remarkably beautiful. During summer, the perennial’s modified leaves range in color from a luxurious, creamy white to bold chartreuse and crimson, sometimes adorned with striking stripes, spots or networks of veins.

Protect their existence: Some species in other areas of the U.S. are endangered, so natives in our region deserve protection. Man is the main predator, typically due to continual clearing of wetlands.

Yours to see: One of Virginia’s largest collections of pitcher plants thrives in the West Island Garden at Lewis Ginter. Watch for its spring blooms!

Source: Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden “Richmond Times-Dispatch” column, June 2016
THANK YOU,
MEMBERS

Just as a garden needs soil, water and sunshine to flourish, this Garden needs you.

You are a vital part of Lewis Ginter. Your membership supports our beautiful gardens, the caliber of our programs and events, and the strength of our mission to connect people through plants to improve communities.

There’s even more you can do to make the most of your membership! Bring a friend to visit and share what you love about this special place. Read our blog and other communications to learn how we’re making a difference in the community. Shop in the Garden Shop or plan a special event here. Take a class, volunteer, make a donation.

Then tell us what you think. What’s important to you is important to us! We’re as close as your phone: 804.262.9887, ext. 338; membership@lewisginter.org
EXHIBITIONS

The Art of Play
March 29–September 30

A Million Blooms
Through June 1

M&T Bank
Butterflies LIVE!
April 12–October 14

EVENTS

Peek-a-Bloom
with Peter Rabbit
April 20 & 21

Spring PlantFest
May 2*, 3 & 4
*Members-only preview

Mother’s Day Weekend
May 11 & 12

Bloemendaal House Tours
Friday, May 17
11 a.m.–3 p.m.

Father’s Day Weekend
June 15 & 16

EXTENDED HOURS

Flowers After 5
Thursdays, June–September 12
(except July 4)
Garden open till 9 p.m.
Live music, wine/beer, dining,
family activities

Fidos After 5
June 13 & 27; July 11 & 25;
August 8 & 22; September 12

Early Bird Weekends
Memorial Day Weekend–
Labor Day
Saturdays & Sundays ONLY
Garden opens 8 a.m.

Visit lewissginter.org
or follow on Facebook
for more events.
BUTTERFLIES LIVE!

APRIL 12–OCTOBER 14

Tropical butterflies transform the Conservatory’s North Wing into a wonderland of vibrant colors, captivating sights and extraordinary discoveries.

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