



The new Visitor Center was built several years after opening day crowds filled the original one to capacity. Photo: Marybeth Parsons, BCMG.

The Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens

By Marybeth Parsons
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My objective for our 2021 vacation: Go someplace **cool** for a major portion of the summer...

In early June, a Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens (CMBG) in Boothbay, Maine (<https://mainegardens.org>) brochure arrived in the mail. They had a new exhibit! I had visited CMBG in 2018 and fallen in love with the

young gardens. I wanted to see how the gardens had grown, matured, and been developed since my last visit, and to see if some of the surprise Texas stalwarts I saw there had survived the Maine winters. And I wanted to see the new exhibit!

The day of our August visit, a CMBG garden docent led a free, hour-long “Highlights” tour of the gardens. She deepened our enjoyment of the gardens by filling in highlighted areas, special plants and collections of the garden, and a brief history of the garden’s development.

The delightful, varied trails and individual gardens provide a diverse menu of areas to explore and, if desired, hike. Volunteers form an integral part of the CMBG staffing, working in multiple areas from Guest Services, Education, Horticulture, to Special Events, and more. Some Guest Services volunteers drive shuttles for 6 – 8 passengers on frequent runs to key stops on the main trails to enable visitors to navigate the sprawling garden.

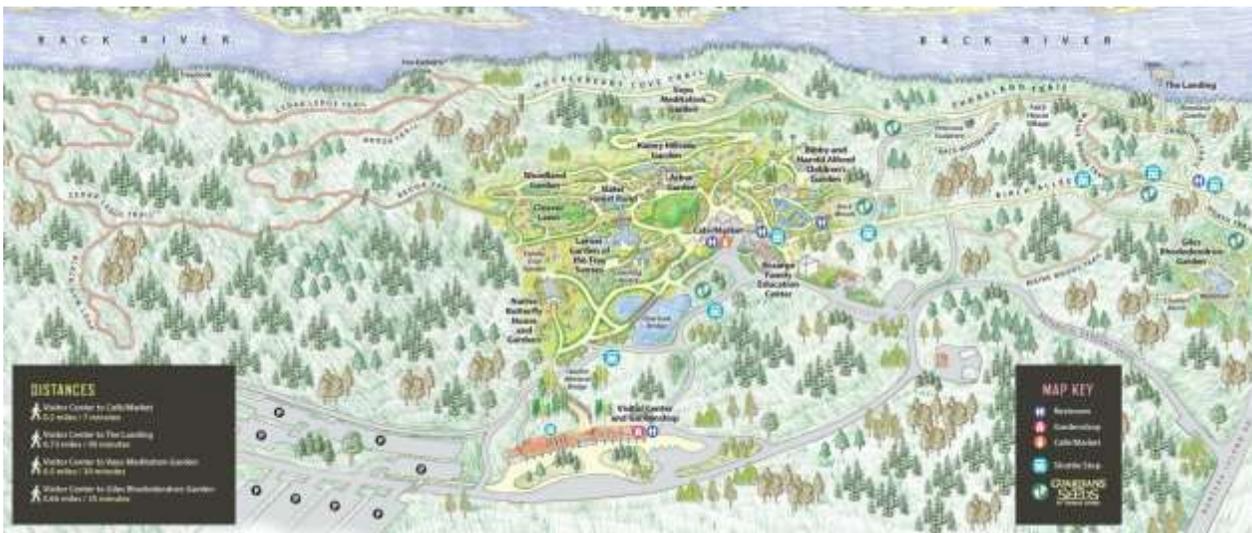


Photo: <https://www.mainegardens.org/visit/gardens-map/>

My favorite top-10 CMBG Features (gardens map: [Gardens Map](#) | [Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens](#))

1. **Butterfly House:** The 2,160 sq.ft. Gothic-style house is shade-screened. The planting scheme supports the life cycle of butterflies and moths native to Maine/New England. Visitors may observe each stage of the pollinators' growth inside. Mourning Cloaks, American and Painted ladies, Red Admirals, Black Swallowtails, and Monarchs may be found in residence. Moth species include Luna, Polyphemus, and Cecropia.



Butterflies abound in the garden.
Photo: Marybeth Parsons, BCMG

2. **Dahlia Garden:** Started as a trial garden, it proved so popular, it was made permanent. It showcases five dozen Dahlia variations of form and color. Eighty cultivars, representing all major dahlia groups, include all rainbow colors except a true blue (a color yet to be developed).

3. **Learning Apiary and Native Bee Exhibit:** Sixteen beehives reside in the garden. The Learning Apiary presents an opportunity to see honeybee families carry out daily operations. Resident beekeepers answer visitor questions and demonstrate hive care and upkeep.

4. **Great Lawn:** Inspired by 19th Century landscape parks, it offers an openness in contrast to the dense woods nearby, featuring a meadow of perennials and grasses, and is for visitors to walk, play, and picnic on.



Beautiful native Maine vistas.
Photo: Marybeth Parsons, BCMG

5. **Garden of the Five Senses:** This compact garden is designed with regions emphasizing the 5 senses – olfactory (fragrant flowers and herbs); taste (edible fruits, vegetables, and flowers); sight (a panoramic garden view); tactile (a reflexology labyrinth); and sound (an area to sit, pause, and listen to the birds, running water, and frogs). It includes varied brick pavers in changing surfaces and patterns and provides a smooth, gently sloping hard surface for wheeled mobility aids. Tactile and visual stimulation sources appeal to the hearing-impaired. Raised beds in the horticultural therapy area provide cutaways for wheelchair gardeners to get close.

6. **Shoreland Trail & The Landing:** A 3-mile network of footpaths is available for a sampling of Maine's forests and ledges. Ending their trek at the Landing, visitors can pause to take in the quiet, enjoy sea breezes, and spot wildlife.

7. **Hillside Garden:** A challenging steep, rocky hillside, the garden features 1,000 feet of switchback paths linking 6,000 native plants and 3 terraces (water, moss, a glass orb). The lower areas, nearer the shoreline, feature natural vegetation.
8. **Forest Pond:** Utilizing a low-lying area, the pond offers native shrubs, trees and water-loving plants and is filled with frogs and aquatic insects. Children love the large stepping stones and sweetly-scented water lilies. Minnows, dragonfly nymphs, and local wildlife keep mosquitos at bay.
9. **Children’s Garden:** Divided into a series of separate spaces, the children’s garden features a learning garden, greenhouse, chicken coop, flowered terrace, story barn, play cottage, small pond, treehouse, and (English design) maze lawn. Daily activities include chicken feeding, story time, puppet shows, and fairy festivities.
10. **Rhododendron & Perennial Garden:** Featuring a pond and waterfall, this garden contains more than 1,000 rhododendrons and related shrubs and a spring bulb display. Hostas, ferns, epimediums and other shade plants provide additional textural interest throughout the summer.



Hydrangea in the Children’s Garden.
Photo: Marybeth Parsons, BCMG

I still haven’t seen it all, after two visits!

You might also enjoy exploring other botanical gardens on your vacations. It’s a simple step to add a horticultural day to your planning with a web search for gardens in your target vacation area. A visit to a new setting is a rejuvenating vacation day to immerse yourself and the family, to recharge your batteries in a new setting dedicated to fostering horticultural beauty and enjoyment.

The American Horticultural Society (AHS) (<https://ahsgardening.org>) network of gardens offers a **Reciprocal Admissions Program** among member gardens. Our San Antonio Botanical Garden (SABOT) and the CMBG are among the 345 AHS members, so when we visited CMBG again this year, admission was FREE to us as SABOT members. (Closer to home: There are 16 other AHS-member gardens right here in Texas for you to visit.)

The gardening and horticultural world awaits you, both near your home, and further away! Add this inexpensive, enlightening, and enriching experience to your next weekend getaway or full-on vacation!

Next Month: Join me for a look at CMBG’s newest exhibit – a 2021 garden-wide collection of five huge Trolls, the “Guardians of the Seeds.” The “Guardians of the Seeds” is an adventure for the imagination, a fascinating, educational journey into the history and sustainability of Maine’s woods for young and old alike.