

Sonoma Botanical Garden

Quick Facts

Founded in 1987, Sonoma Botanical Garden (SBG) is a woodland experience where East meets West by celebrating the beauty and importance of Asian and California native plants. Situated in the picturesque Sonoma Valley, SBG's 67 acres is home to a unique Asian woodland a California native oak savanna, and a Cabernet vineyard. Its mission is to inspire an appreciation and understanding of the beauty and value of Asian and California native plants and to promote their conservation in natural habitats and gardens.

History and Collections

In 1968, philanthropist and plant enthusiast Jane Davenport Jansen purchased the site northeast of Glen Ellen in the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains. Around her wine country home, she planted Cabernet Sauvignon grapes on the valley floor, and began to take an interest in the upland parcel, the site of an abandoned sandstone quarry.

With the shift in U.S.-China relations during the 1970s and 80s, new garden plants arriving from China sparked enormous interest among landscape designers and gardeners. At the same time, China's rapid industrialization began to significantly threaten its temperate flora. Recognizing a unique global conservation need, Jansen established what was then Quarryhill Botanical Garden in 1987 and funded a series of seed-collecting expeditions to Asia in partnership with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in London, and the Howick Arboretum in Northumberland.

By the spring of 1990, young plants grown in the Garden's nursery from these wild-collected seeds had been planted on the steep hillsides above the vineyard. Ponds and meandering streambeds were built to enhance the existing geology and compliment the Asian woodland. The Garden opened to the general public in the early 2000s. Annual collecting expeditions continued until 2017, and today, SBG is home to one of the largest collections of scientifically documented, wild-source Asian plants in North America, many rare and endangered. Oaks, maples, magnolias, dogwoods, conifers, lilies, rhododendrons, and roses are particularly well-represented.

In 2021, the name was changed to Sonoma Botanical Garden to reflect a new initiative to add a focus on California's rich native flora, another biodiversity hotspot facing many of the same challenges that inspired Jansen to conserve Asian plants in the 1980s. The adjacent 22-acre property, added to the Garden in 1998, is now home to the Garden's California Oaks Trail and offers an unprecedented opportunity to interpret, celebrate, and cultivate California plants in tandem with the Garden's historic focus on Asian species. California is home to some of the same genera that anchor the temperate flora of East Asia. This complementary direction gives SBG the unique opportunity to tie together local impact and global relevance.

In 2023, SBG's vineyard partner, La Prenda Wines, achieved organic certification for the Garden's 13 legacy acres of Cabernet and released the first publicly available wine produced from SBG's vineyard.

Conservation

SBG's approximately 20,000 individual plants, representing almost 1,500 different species, provide a rich repository for the preservation and study of unique, rare, and endangered plants. SBG actively participates in global conservation efforts and research, providing plant material, seeds, and data to other botanic gardens, arboreta, and plant researchers around the world. This includes the Garden's active participation in the Global Conservation Consortium for Magnolia, as well as national multi-site membership for both Magnolia and Maple through the Plant Collection Network of the American Public Gardens Association.

Public Engagement

SBG offers over 3 miles of meandering paths through its unique woodlands for self-guided visits, with spectacular vistas over the Valley and lovely picnic spots throughout. Seasonal color and bloom events are a highlight. Visitors can also find unique garden gifts and books in the Welcome Center gift shop.

The Garden also offers guided tours, educational programs, and events to engage visitors of all ages, providing fun and informative opportunities to explore the rich diversity of Asian and California native plants while appreciating their beauty and ecological significance.

Special art and nature themed exhibitions each year provide always new and changing ways for the public to enjoy the Garden.

General Info

Sonoma Botanical Garden is open daily, except for some holidays. The Garden is located at 12841 Hwy 12, Glen Ellen, CA. Admission is \$15 for adults, with discounts for seniors, teens, active military, and students. Children 4 and under are always FREE.

More info at sonomabg.org.