

Santa Fe Botanical Garden

by Mary S. Chaddock



Rising high above the Meadow Garden, 'Spirit House', made of cast bronze and stainless steel by Santa Fe artist Kevin Box, was part of the recent large-scale 'Origami in the Garden' exhibit at the Santa Fe Botanical Garden.

WHEN IT COMES to growing plants, Santa Fe, New Mexico, is certainly one of the more challenging environments. This region, bathed in intense sun and drying winds, receives only an average of 14 inches of rain and snow a year and can experience temperature swings of 30 to 40 degrees in the same day. Despite these formidable conditions, the Santa Fe Botanical Garden (SFBG) is flourishing on two sites and constructing a formal public garden on a third.

WILD BEGINNINGS

The SFBG, founded in 1987 by citizens sharing a vision of creating a botanical garden in Santa Fe, became a physical reality in 1993 when the organization began managing the 35-acre **Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve**, located 11 miles south of Santa Fe. The main attraction of this spring-fed preserve is the *ciénega*, or marsh. Here, paths shaded by native trees such as Rio Grande cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) and lanceleaf poplar (*P. ×acuminata*) guide visitors into the riparian/wetland zone, which is a haven for migratory waterfowl. The preserve also features a dry woodland, primarily populated by pinyon pine (*Pinus edulis*), the state tree, and New Mexico juniper (*Juniperus monosperma*).

This pinyon–juniper plant community is also indigenous to the 1,350-acre **Ortiz Mountains Educational Preserve**, managed by SFBG. Located 30 miles south of Santa Fe, this truly rugged preserve boasts Place Peak, which at 8,897 feet is the highest peak on the Ortiz range. Recent botanical research here has tripled the size of the SFBG herbarium's collection of native plants. The preserve is open only for scheduled events or by special arrangement.

NEW URBAN LOCATION

In contrast to the preserves, the Santa Fe Botanical Garden at Museum Hill is



One of the SFBG's iconic features is La Rambla, a stone channel that functions as a stormwater drain. Here it also serves as a setting for Kevin Box's 'Painted Ponies' metal sculptures

centrally located on 14 acres in the city, surrounded by other cultural attractions. Opened in July 2013, it is already enjoying enormous popularity: In its first year, over 30,000 people representing all 50 states and many countries visited, according to Scott Canning, horticultural director. "You wouldn't mistake Santa Fe Botanical Garden for anyplace else. Here plants stand alone and distinct," says Canning of the garden's aesthetic, which takes full advantage of striking silhouettes and sculptural growth habits.

Native or non-native, plants for this garden are chosen both for beauty and for their adaptability to the semi-arid Santa Fe cli-



Golden prickly pear (*Opuntia basilaris* var. *aurea*) blooms in the SFBG's Dry Garden.

mate. Visitors may expect to see everything from the dramatic beaked yucca (*Yucca rostrata*), state flower of New Mexico, to the rambunctious, sun-loving 'Madame Galen' trumpet vine (*Campsis x tagliabuana*), a cross between a North American native and a Chinese trumpet vine that bears reddish-orange blooms all summer long.

The Santa Fe climate also can provide ideal conditions for unexpected plants. For example, the lack of humidity, abundant sunlight, and cool nights keep the garden's eight carefully selected varieties of roses looking great three seasons a year, notes Canning. Similarly, these conditions are helping a mix of usually disease-prone apple, apricot, cherry, plum, peach, and pear trees thrive in the **Orchard Garden**.

In striking contrast to the relative lushness of the orchard, the nearby **Dry Garden** and its xeric landscaping showcases a collection of cold-hardy but heat-loving cacti. One of these, claret cup hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus*), native to New Mexico, only grows two to 16 inches tall and spends the winter desiccated by a lack of water. But in spring, when the rains come, it plumps up and bursts into bloom from April through June.

The absence or relative abundance of water is a connecting theme throughout the garden. For example, a subtle feature of the **Meadow Garden** is its shallow bowl-shape designed to catch and hold precious rainwa-

Additional Information

Santa Fe Botanical Garden, 715 Camino Lejo, Santa Fe, NM 87505. (505) 471-9103. www.santafebotanicalgarden.org.

- Hours: April to October open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; November to March, open Thursday to Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Admission: Members free. Adult (12+) \$7, Senior (65+) and Active Military \$6, Students (with ID) \$5, Children (under 12) free.

SFBG participates in the American Horticultural Society Reciprocal Admissions Program. AHS members showing a current AHS membership card receive free admission and discounts on educational programs or events.

Other nearby sites to explore:

Allan Houser Sculpture Gardens, Santa Fe, NM. www.indianart.us.

Bandelier National Monument, Los Alamos, NM. www.nps.gov/band.

Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe, NM. www.indianartsandculture.org.

Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM. www.internationalfolkart.org.

ter. **La Rambla**, a handcrafted rock channel running behind, through, and beyond the meadow, also helps to slow down stormwater, giving it a chance to seep into the soil.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Still to come at Museum Hill are three more gardens—**Ojos y Manos: Eyes and Hands**, **The Courtyard Gardens**, and the **Arroyo Trails**. Embodying different aspects of the northern New Mexico landscape and centuries of human habitation, these future gardens will be an interactive experience encompassing art, landscape architecture, and educational experiences for children and adults.

While it works to complete these new spaces, SFBG already has plenty to offer by artfully combining the region's spare beauty, sweeping horizons, and tough plants into a destination that will appeal to visitors of all ages.

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