





A photograph of a campus garden. In the background, a two-story brick building with a dark roof and a chimney is visible. The foreground is filled with lush greenery, including tall, thin stalks of flowers and dense bushes. The title "Splendor in the Grass" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the middle of the image.

# *Splendor in the Grass*

Amid the stresses of daily life,  
campus gardens offer a colorful  
and calming oasis

**FLOWER POWER:** The gardens  
behind the A.D. White House  
are among the oldest and  
most beloved on campus.



Cornell is renowned for its natural beauty—not only the semi-wild delights of its gorges and waterfalls but also the more manicured loveliness of its carefully tended flowers and shrubs. In addition to the many small planted beds located throughout campus—most prominently, the bright red geraniums around the CORNELL UNIVERSITY signs that welcome visitors with a cheery pop of color from late spring to early fall—are more than twenty official gardens, some of which have graced the Hill for decades. “Our gardens are in many ways not as formal as those on some other campuses that are very geometric in shape, with straight lines and corners,” observes Dan Schied, the University’s grounds director. “Ours are a little more curvilinear, and I think that makes a big difference. We’re really trying to complement the natural beauty of Ithaca rather than detract from it.”

Perhaps the best known garden on campus is one of the oldest: the dramatic arrangement of flora behind the A.D. White House, formerly the University’s presidential residence. The garden—an image of which Schied uses as a Zoom background—includes a secluded “secret” section as well as a mixture of annuals and perennials that provide a riot of color in season. For decades, it has been tended by Kim Klein ’90, a CALS horticulture alum and senior gardener on the grounds staff who notes that it traces its (literal) roots to Daisy Farrand, wife of Cornell’s fourth president, who “brought the gardens back to life” while living in the mansion in the 1920s and 1930s. “If you’re accustomed to the hustle and bustle—the noise and the traffic and the crowds—on campus, when you go up there it feels like you’re walking into a quieter, slower-paced environment,” Klein says. “You’re more aware of the chipmunks, squirrels, and butterflies. You hear the birds, and sometimes just the quiet.”

Most gardens on campus are tended by the grounds staff, with crews assigned to one of four zones. An exception is Minns Garden, located on Tower Road off the Ag Quad, which is a teaching facility maintained by CALS students and faculty; named for Lua Minns, Cornell’s first female professor of floriculture, it was originally located on Garden Avenue (hence the street’s name) near Bailey Hall. “The beauty of our gardens is that they’re right on Central Campus, close by where you’re working or studying,” says University landscape architect David Cutter ’84, BS ’85. “You don’t have to make a special trip. If it’s a nice day and you’ve got a couple of minutes between classes or you want to eat lunch outside, they’re easy to use.”

Among Cutter’s favorites is the Japanese garden outside the Johnson

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Museum; designed by Marc Peter Keane ’79, it features natural elements symbolizing the *Three Laughers of the Tiger Glen*, an ancient parable about overcoming differences. Nina Bassuk ’74, a longtime horticulture professor who co-teaches a popular course entitled “Creating the Urban Eden,” cites as one of her favorites the Centennial Garden tucked behind Mann Library; she describes that secluded and shady spot, which her students designed in 2004, as “very calming and cool in the summer.” Other gardens on Central Campus include the colorful collection of azaleas across from ILR and the Willard Straight Rock Garden, nestled between the Straight and Cornell Health. “To >

### **Rhododendron Collection** (right)

Located on Comstock Knoll near the Botanic Gardens visitor center, the collection is at its most brilliant in May and early June—when it’s ablaze with pink, red, white, and yellow blossoms (not only rhododendrons but also azaleas) set amid steep, narrow pathways and numerous hostas, ferns, and other flora.

PHOTOS: THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS SPREAD, ROBERT BARKER/UREL















me, one of the most wonderful things is the great diversity of gardens we have," Cutter says. "Whatever mood you're in, whatever you're looking for, you can definitely find a garden on campus to meet your needs."

What's the difference between an official "garden" and a bunch of plantings? "I don't think there's a hard and fast rule," Bassuk replies—but, she says, it can be generally defined as "a purposeful collection of plants, planted in a certain design to elicit different functions or experiences." Her yearlong "Urban Eden" course culminates with students teaming up to design and install a landscape or garden—one that becomes an enduring part of campus. She notes that in addition to adding to the overall beauty of the Hill, appropriate plantings reduce energy and air pollution and combat wind. "They provide ecosystem services that amount to monetary benefits as well as environmental benefits," Bassuk says.

And while students, faculty, and

staff can enjoy numerous garden spots during their daily travels around campus, they also have access to a nearby facility devoted entirely to flora: the Cornell Botanic Gardens (formerly Cornell Plantations), which boasts twenty-five acres of tended gardens in addition to an

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arboretum and vast natural areas. Those gardens include a dramatic collection of rhododendrons and spaces devoted to herbs and to wildflowers—even a garden specifically designed to shine in the depths of an Ithaca winter. "The Botanic Gardens can connect with people at an intellectual level, or at a more emotional level," observes director Christopher

Dunn. "Even at a spiritual level."

As Dunn notes, the gardens have played a particularly vital role during COVID—a time when many campus facilities are closed but Cornellians may be desperately in need of solace amid the stresses of the pandemic. "We have received comment after comment from people saying how grateful they are that this resource is here," he says. "It has been an amazing place for people to exhale—or inhale; to feel more connected with the earth, to get away from their troubles. It has been a place for renewal, to get out of the house, to get a little bit of exercise and fresh air. Study after study has shown that spending even just a few minutes in nature or in a garden does amazing things for one's mental wellbeing."

*The photos on these and the following pages—which offer a sampling of Cornell's many gardens—were taken prior to the COVID pandemic and the University's requirement for face coverings.*

### **Hidden Garden (left)**

This CALS oasis is one of the Hill's "secret gardens"—those partially concealed by buildings or greenery. Its protected location—in a courtyard near the Bailey Conservatory—allows it to house plants not usually found in a climate as cold as Ithaca's.

### **Ruth Uris Garden (above)**

Just off busy Tower Road—along a path that also passes by the A.D. White House and Big Red Barn—is this peaceful spot, which boasts artfully arranged rocks as well as a small cascade that empties into a pool.





### **Robison Herb Garden** *(top)*

Among the visitor favorites at the Botanic Gardens is this grouping of seventeen themed beds with more than 500 varieties of herbs and other plants—including those that are fragrant, medicinal, and culinary.

### **Rockwell Azalea Garden** *(above)*

Located on Tower Road near Malott Hall, this dramatic collection of colorful flowering bushes offers a Central Campus counterpart to Comstock Knoll and its plethora of rhododendrons and azaleas.

### **Morgan Garden** *(right)*

According to the Johnson Museum, this Japanese garden on its grounds is based on the *karesansui* style, “in which the image of the landscape and water is created without the use of actual water.”









#### **Minns Garden** *(above)*

Originally located west of its current spot, this venerable campus garden—overseen by CALS students and faculty—got its distinctive wrought-iron gates in 2008; created by a local artist-blacksmith, they feature intricate depictions of the flora within.

#### **Bioswale Garden** *(below)*

As horticulture professor Nina Bassuk '74 observes, gardens can be functional as well as attractive. This collection of plantings near the Botanic Gardens visitor center was designed to slow and clean storm water runoff from the adjacent parking lot.



PHOTOS: TOP, KOSKI; BOTTOM, CORNELL BOTANIC GARDENS