

Beautiful bushels of azaleas, Camilla's, rhododendrons and viburnums are beginning to bloom in the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Botanical Gardens as spring rolls in.

These gardens have grown a substantial amount over the last 40 years. From the first installment of the Van Landingham Glen Garden, which was originally created as a living classroom for students and is also the final resting place of our very own Bonnie E. Cone, to having 10 acres of outdoor gardens and a greenhouse. The Glen, also the former meeting place of the Rhododendron Society, is a woodland garden that houses native wildflowers and plants.

It is also the personal favorite of UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens Director Jeffery Gillman due to the forest plants there. At this time of year, you should expect to see the Glen's floors covered in bloodroot, a plant that produces a beautiful, white, solitary flower.

The Carolina Trail is a favorite of Jennifer Bueno-Hutchens, an employee and horticulturist at the UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens.

"The Carolina Garden Trail which is our food garden throughout the Carolinas dating from indigenous to present day," said Bueno-Hutchens. "Plants include Carolina rice, peanuts, sweet grass, sugar cane, asparagus, swiss chard, various herbs and medicinal plants."

The Carolina Trail hosts six smaller gardens and tells the story of how the Carolinas have developed through different time periods and cultures. The first section you will encounter is the pre-colonization section. You may find sunflowers, squash, mayhaw and Aztec tobacco as you walk through this section. In the colonization to Revolutionary War section, you can expect to see African rice, black-eyed peas, indigo, peaches, okra and sesame. For the Revolutionary War to Civil War section, dill, mulberry, upland cotton, watermelon, and wheat might be growing.

From the Civil War to WWI section, you may see asparagus, soybean, and tomato. While you make your way through the WWI to WWII section, you may see apples, blueberries, cucumber, onions, peanuts, and strawberries. And finally, in the WWII to present day section, you may see collard greens, corn, hops, potatoes and yam.

The Susie Hardwood Gardens are another part of the ever-growing botanical gardens. In contrast to the Glen, which is a native woodland, the Susie Hardwood Garden has both native and non-native plants. The Susie Hardwood Garden includes the Asian Garden, which is an American interpretation of Asian traditions from multiple nations; the Winter Trail, the home of winter-blooming plants; and the Mellichamp Native Terrance, the newest addition to the gardens.

The Mellichamp Native Terrance is named after Larry Mellichamp, the director emeritus, former professor, author of multiple botanical books and the developer of the Mellichamp sarracenia hybrids. Mellichamp went to work on developing these hybrids in the UNC Chapel and UNC Charlotte botanical gardens after witnessing the destruction of sarracenia in the Carolina wetlands. The UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens are one of the few gardens that grows and sells these hybrids.

The McMillan Greenhouse has diverse plants all year round. The McMillan Greenhouse, known for being the only botanical garden in the Charlotte area to feature carnivorous and bog plants, is also home to a variety of desert succulents, tropical plants, and orchids. The Greenhouse has a teaching classroom, a botanical and horticultural library, a desert room, a dinosaur garden and an economic room that host many of the plants that provide us common such as oranges, chocolate, vanilla and more.

The Botanical Gardens continue to grow with the confirmation of a tea house garden by Gillman.

"We're in the process of planting a tea house garden," said Gillman. "The tea house garden consists of a small gazebo outside of which a number of different tea varieties are planted."

The Botanical Gardens also offer a variety of different events open to the public, such as native plant studies courses, home gardening courses, meditative guided walks and more, with some courses being eligible for credit towards a Certificate in Native Plant Studies. The certificate was designed for community members interested in the wide assortment of native plants of the Carolinas. You can find the information for upcoming events and courses on the UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens website.