



*Visitor Experiences in the
Enid A. Haupt Garden
and the
Mary Livingston Ripley Garden*

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Preface

It is like a Secret Garden – filled with gorgeous flowers.

Visitors to the Smithsonian Institution, whether on dismal days of winter or glorious days of spring, have the opportunity to enjoy the Smithsonian gardens. These range from the Enid A. Haupt Garden, described by a seven year-old visitor in the quote above, to the more than 33,000 plants of 150 species found in four habitats around the National Museum of the American Indian, to the Victory Garden outside the National Museum of American History.

Nancy Bechtol, Director of the Office of Facilities Management, requested this study of two of the gardens. I would like to thank both Nancy and Assistant Director Barbara Faust, who facilitated the study. Staff in the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A), Zahava D. Doering, Kathleen M. Ernst, Amy L. Marino, Ioana Munteanu, Andrew J. Pekarik, and Whitney Watriss interviewed visitors as a welcome change from indoor assignments. Kathleen analyzed the comments and Leslye Hand, an OP&A intern, conducted detailed observations. Zahava D. Doering and Kathleen M. Ernst wrote this report. I gratefully acknowledge their efforts.

I also appreciate the cooperation of visitors who let us interrupt their visits to share experiences with us. They cheerfully took time from looking at the flowers, eating lunch, or taking pictures to participate in the study.

Carole M. P. Neves, Director

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Introduction

Tourists to Washington, DC, visitors to the Smithsonian Institution (SI), and business people coming to the nation's capital discover that the city is a lush metropolis of open vistas, green spaces, and luxuriant gardens. Most are familiar with the National Mall – an open area of wide lawns, gardens, fountains, trees, and monuments stretching nearly two miles between the U.S. Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial. Many have encountered the Smithsonian's "outdoor museums" – carefully designed and tended spaces that complement the adjacent museums, and whose goal is to "enhance the overall museum experience of learning, appreciation, and enjoyment."¹ These outdoor museums include: the *Butterfly Habitat Garden*, a joint project with the National Museum of Natural History; the *Enid A. Haupt Garden*, located directly above the subterranean S. Dillon Ripley Center, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and National Museum of African Art (NMAfA); the *Mary Livingston Ripley Garden*, nestled between the Hirshhorn Museum and the Arts and Industries Building (A&I); the *Kathrine Dulin Folger Rose Garden*, on the east side of the Smithsonian Castle Building (Castle) and Jefferson Drive façade of A&I; the recessed *Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden*; the *Victory Garden* and *Heirloom Garden* at the National Museum of American History; the Freer Gallery courtyard garden; and landscape gardens surrounding the National Air and Space Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian.

While some of the gardens associated with the Smithsonian are relatively new, developed as integral parts of new facilities, horticulture appears quite early in the Smithsonian's history. For example, an early proposal for the use of funds left to the United States by James Smithson emphasized the "useful sciences" of natural history, chemistry, geology, and astronomy, but above all agricultural science. One bill, introduced in 1845 by Senator Benjamin Tappan of Ohio, called for the creation of professorships and lecturers with expertise in the productive and liberal arts, especially improvements in agriculture, horticulture, and rural economy.²

Three years later, in 1848, the Congress passed an Act for the Improvement and Care of the Smithsonian Institution Grounds by

1 Quoted in Smithsonian Institution, Horticulture Services Division (2005). *The Gardens at the Smithsonian* brochure. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution. The brochure includes brief descriptions of all of the SI gardens.

2 See both the Fifth Bill to Establish the Smithsonian (Tappan) and the Sixth Bill to Establish the Smithsonian (Owen) at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/smithson/bill5.html> and <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/smithson/bill6.html>, accessed October 18, 2005.

the Government.³ For the next 125 years, the Smithsonian viewed horticulture as part of its maintenance programs. In 1972, the Smithsonian set up the Office of Horticulture to manage the grounds of Smithsonian buildings near the Mall, and in 1976, the Smithsonian recognized horticulture as an official museum program. In 1991, responsibility for horticulture was moved to a Horticulture Services Division (HSD) within the Office of Plant Services. The Horticulture Branch Library of SI Libraries, established in 1984 as a research support resource for the Horticulture Services Division, holds a growing collection on the subject and includes more than 150 American titles on landscape design dating from the 19th- and early 20th-centuries.

Anecdotes, testimonials, media reports, and personal experiences of SI staff all point to the extraordinary value of the gardens. For example, as reported in *USA TODAY*'s Travel section on October 14, 2005, the Ripley Garden was one of the top ten public gardens recognized by *Horticulture* magazine for “exemplifying excellence in horticultural practice, design, and display.”⁴ To date, however, a systematic analysis of user perceptions has not been conducted. Such an analysis is the purpose of this report. Undertaken at the request of HSD, the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) reviewed existing documentation and interviewed and observed garden visitors. Conversations with HSD led to restricting the study to two gardens: the Enid A. Haupt Garden and the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden.

Descriptions of the two gardens and analyses based on interviews, comment cards, and observations follow.

*The Enid A. Haupt Garden*⁵

As noted above, the Enid A. Haupt Garden (Haupt Garden) is a garden above the underground areas of the Sackler Gallery, Ripley Center, and NMAfA. The Haupt Garden, opened to the public in 1987 when these museums were inaugurated, includes three distinct areas—the Asian-influenced Moongate Garden, a Moorish-style Fountain Garden, and the central 19th-century parterre. There are four entrances to the garden: the main entrance is through the cast iron carriage

3 Goode, G. B., ed. (1897). *The Smithsonian Institution, 1846-1896, the history of its first half century*. Washington, DC: De Vinne Press, p. 834.

4 The ten public gardens receiving the Horticulture Magazine/AABGA Award for Garden Excellence included the Denver Botanic Garden and Missouri Botanical Garden.

5 Description based on Smithsonian Institution, Horticulture Services Division (2005). *The Gardens at the Smithsonian* brochure. Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution.



Renwick Gates⁶ at Independence Avenue; another is between the east side of the Castle and A&I; a third is between the west side of the Castle and the Ripley Center; and the fourth entry is through the back center doors of the Castle. Throughout the garden are Victorian-era garden furnishings from HSD's collection.

The Moongate Garden, located beside the entrance pavilion to the Sackler, uses architectural and symbolic elements found in the Temple of Heaven, a 15th-century masterpiece in Beijing, China. The forms of circle and square (representing heaven and earth, respectively) are evident throughout the garden. The Fountain Garden, located beside the entrance pavilion to NMAfA, is modeled after the 13th century Court of the Lions at the Alhambra, in Granada, Spain. This garden is geometrically symmetrical and includes a central fountain and water channels.

The parterre, a French term meaning “on the ground,” is the centerpiece of the Haupt Garden. It is a formal garden with symmetrical patterns that change seasonally. Designs incorporate such motifs as diamonds, fleur-de-lis, swags, scallops, and S-shaped curves. The formal parterre, typically associated with the elaborate designs of the Victorian era, was designed to complement the ornate architecture of the Castle.

6 In 1979, Secretary S. Dillon Ripley asked James Goode, keeper of the Castle, to supervise the design and construction of the gardens and gates. The new gates were based on an 1849 drawing by James Renwick, Jr., architect of the Smithsonian Institution Castle. The design included piers made of the same sandstone that went into the Castle's great reddish walls.

The Mary Livingston Ripley Garden⁷

The Mary Livingston Ripley Garden (Ripley Garden) has a serpentine pathway lined with Victorian iron benches that begins in a small shaded area on Independence Avenue, meanders between the Victorian A&I building and the modern, doughnut-shaped Hirshhorn Museum to Jefferson Drive, which runs along the National Mall. A restored 19th-century cast-iron fountain near the front is a favorite spot for taking souvenir photographs. This almost hidden garden also is a teaching garden with a diversity of unusual plants. During good weather, an informal garden tour is conducted every Tuesday at 2 p.m., giving visitors a chance to ask questions and talk about the nuances and problems of growing plants.

At present, the Ripley Garden contains over 200 varieties of labeled annuals, perennials, shrubs, trees, vines, ground covers, and herbs. The garden is designed with all four seasons in mind. Thus, in the spring, visitors can wander the winding path through the greenery or rest on a bench surrounded by crocus, geraniums, and rosemary. At the end of the year, lights, ornaments, and orbs exude holiday cheer.



⁷ Based partly on a *Smithsonian* magazine interview with Janet Draper, horticulturist for the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden and the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden. See http://www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/journeys/01/mar01/featured_expert_draper.html, accessed October 18, 2005.

Interviews with Visitors

From dawn to dusk, at all times of the year, visitors can be found at both the Haupt and Ripley gardens. On snowy January mornings, a few people walk through or pause to admire plantings; on warm summer afternoons, the gardens teem with people. In the course of eight weeks, from July 11 to September 5, 2005, OP&A staff talked to 22 visitor groups – a total of 40 children, women, and men – about their experiences in these gardens. They included an 88-year-old woman from New Jersey, three Taiwanese students and their Japanese professor, a local musician, and a volunteer at the National Museum of African Art on a lunch break.

In selecting visitors for interviews, OP&A did not follow a rigorous sampling scheme; thus, the fact that so many of the interviewees were local does not necessarily reflect higher usage on the part of local residents. Nearly half of the visitors OP&A encountered lived within a few hours of the National Mall, a much higher percentage than is the case for overall Smithsonian visitors.⁸

By way of introducing some of the recurrent themes, excerpts from an interview in the Ripley Garden one early August morning are provided below. This woman is in her mid-40's and works nearby:

Interviewee: I walk through it everyday on my way to work. I find it very relaxing. I like to see what is growing, where it's growing, the color combinations. I hate weeding, I hate gardening, but I just enjoy this garden so much; it is a great way to start a day.

Interviewer: How long have you been doing this?

Interviewee: [For] over a year now. I walk through it in the winter. Everyday I walk through here; this is like my peace and quiet before I start going to work. I work for [a government agency] and I deal with congressional offices so some days it's a very stressful job. But I like seeing what they do with the fountain and in the winter - they put the greens up and the twinkly lights and then I watch them take it down and put the water back in. And this year she's done geraniums that are in kind of a trellis that I've never seen done. So it's just a very nice experience. Last year I also got to see them band a black schnook hummingbird. I have

⁸ The most recent studies of all visitors to the Smithsonian show that 15% are local visitors, 10% are visiting from countries other than the U.S., and the remaining 75% are non-local U.S. residents. See Smithsonian Institution, Office of Policy and Analysis (2004), *Results of the 2004 Smithsonian-wide Survey of Museum Visitors*, page 6.

hummingbirds where I am but I've never seen one like that. So, you know, it's just a great experience for me.

Interviewer: Are there other gardens that you visit?

Interviewee: *Not as regularly as this because I have a long commute. I'm on the bus for about forty minutes to an hour and a half one-way from Columbia, Maryland. And I am also from Buffalo, so this is just a very nice thing. I also do the Smithsonian garden on the other side. Every morning. ...*

... This [Ripley] is more colorful; it's got more varieties. They both are well maintained but this is more user-friendly. The other is more formal. I have enjoyed what they have done there with the pots and bringing in the different heights and types of leaves and different flowers. I love the gardenia tree over there, that's my all-time favorite. How does it compare? They are totally different. Both well maintained but different expressions of what you can do with flowers.

Interviewer: What did you like best about the Ripley Garden?

Interviewee: *The colors. I like everything: the people I say good morning to will say good morning back to me; if I've got a question about a rose or something, I'll stop and ask them and they are very gracious about answering my questions. I have yet to go on the tour; it's pretty hard for me to get out during the day to do that. I don't know if this is funded by my tax dollars, but I appreciate it. Believe me, I am getting my money's worth out of it.*

... I just enjoy whatever they do. I'm such a novice when it comes to gardening and that's why I wander around and see what different types of plants [there are] and how they're doing things to them. I would like to know how to get some of the seeds. I was just reading about the seeds that fall to the ground; maybe I could collect the seeds and take them home and throw them in my garden just for a little spice of color or something.

... As you saw, I stop and I read the little signs and stuff that I am interested in. I really can't think of anything [to add] because I'm not a gardener... I had a garden as a child, I had a Victory Garden, and I hate pulling up weeds -- so for me, a garden is silk flowers! That's my type of garden. For what they are doing, I think they are doing a great job and with the tours and that, if I could go and ask more questions. ...

Interviewer: Do you think about it away from work, or tell others about it?

Interviewee: *Oh yes! I have told a couple of my buddies who ride with me on the bus that they need to come through here. The one was planting a garden himself, and I said 'you need to go and see what they have done here.' So yes, I have talked about it, and yes, I kind of wish that in the evening I could walk back; but I've got a bus to catch and often I am running for it so I can't do that. I would love to see more lights in the winter and I [would] like to have them on when I am walking through in the morning; it is a delight to go down Independence in the evening when it's dark and see the lights in the trees, but it would kind of be nice to have it early in the morning when I am walking through at this time.*

Interviewer: Anything else that you would like to add?

Interviewee: *No, just please thank everybody for it. When I see them I say good morning, because I do appreciate their efforts and it's just amazing—the knowledge they have to have to pull this off. And this year... they had a lot of purple in the spring, all over the place, so it's like 'Okay, this year is purple.' What's next year?*

Interviewer: How did you start coming through here?

Interviewee: *I just wanted to walk more, so that was the reason. And I get tired of doing things, so I started varying my routine. I've only been in DC like five years, and I don't like taking the same way every day to work, so I like to change and I've just enjoyed it. It gives me enough stimulation; yet I'm relaxed and I can see what's happening with every season. Maybe they could put a sign out for tourists; they could put a handout to say what's going on with the garden. I haven't seen the rooster this year. Last year they had a rooster that they would put out for the different tours, and I would try and spot it. But I haven't seen it this year.*

... My schedule is just so hectic and one day to another is totally different, so I hope you're not thinking about tearing it down or closing it up or anything. I think it's worth my tax dollars; I vote for it! ...

Frequency of Visits

This woman is quick to point out that for over a year she has come to the Ripley Garden every day before work. Among the



interviewees, a majority indicated that they had visited Smithsonian gardens before. This included visitors from outside the Washington, DC area as well as local residents.

An organizer of community gardens in Philadelphia, interviewed in the Ripley Garden, noted:

I do research at the National Archives, so when I come down I always run through.

A woman who works near the Ripley and Haupt Gardens said:

I walk through the gardens every day. I walk over to the reflecting pool [fountain/waterfall by NMAfA]. It's very calming and relaxing, so I like to walk through here. I like to look at the flowers. I like to be out on my lunch break walking around.

A group of Taiwanese students at Georgetown University were drawn back after a recent visit:

Yes. We have been here about two weeks ago. We came here to visit a museum, and the Castle, and we found this garden. [Today], for us, we came here because of our teacher, but also because we were here before.

Reasons for and Value of the Visits

Interviewees were very forthcoming about their reasons for coming to the Ripley and Haupt Gardens. Most found the gardens, as did the

first interviewee, relaxing, peaceful, and quiet, and a place for reflecting on the beauty of nature.

An SI employee noted:

I work in the Castle and I like to come out here... a lot of times on my lunch breaks... and I just love reading out here. It is very peaceful, just very quiet..

One of the Taiwanese students said:

I feel very relaxed here, maybe because there are many blossoms there, and it's very well organized. Maybe this is why. I like visiting here.

A former coal miner, in the Haupt Garden, said:

I think that just [I like] the stress free atmosphere and I like the shade, where you could be in the shade or I like the sun where you can be in the sun if you wanted to be. It's just beautiful and I'm just... I was a coal miner all of my life, I was in the dirt and dust. I worked in management for a number of years and then I went with the union and I enjoy clean fresh air...

Other visitors viewed the gardens as a place for increasing their knowledge about plants and for getting ideas for their own gardens. They saw the importance of the Smithsonian maintaining the gardens for their educational value.

The community garden organizer indicated:

[I'm] just seeing what I could grow myself. I look it up on the net and see if I could obtain it.

Two commercial gardeners recognized that:

You see very unusual plants here, which you don't see anyplace else. And that's kind of what we're always looking



for – something a little different. And we like the foliage. You've got some excellent foliage here

A woman having lunch with her husband, after a visit to the Hirshhorn, noted:

I enjoy seeing the different plants. I like gardening so it's an education in itself just to walk around and see the names of plants. I like to see how the plants are grouped. And I think the atmosphere is just beautiful. I don't think we could find a prettier spot.

Grandparents from Richmond, VA were looking ahead to the next visit:

I think it's extremely important [for SI to maintain it]. I think it's an education. We have grandchildren and we were just speaking about bringing the boys up and I would definitely bring them here because I want to cultivate an interest in plants with them. So this would definitely be a spot that I would bring the grandboys. I think it's very important.

Striking a similar note, two men on a lunch break replied:

It's extremely important. You get so many tourists coming to town, and it is a beautiful place for them to walk through and then take back with them the experience of seeing a wonderful garden. A lot of people don't have anything like this at home.

-- The way I look at it, people know about the museums and come here for the museums, and they don't realize maybe that the gardens are here and it's like, hey look, there's a garden here and it's kind of a surprise interlude and I think very much appreciated.

Visitors' comments reveal that the gardens have value beyond the visit. The first interviewee noted that she recommends it to co-workers; other interviewees commented that having 'discovered' the gardens, they will return for another visit or will use them as places to eat lunch. One local apartment-dweller talked about sharing the information:

... Every once in a while, if there is something that really strikes me and I remember the name, I will tell my mother. She is up in Massachusetts, and she has a garden, and I'll ask her if she knows that [flower] and if she has any of that particular plant, if it's easy to care for...

Specific Features

As part of the interview process, OP&A asked visitors to comment about specific aspects of the gardens, as well as to compare the Ripley and Haupt Gardens to each other and to other gardens they may have seen. The labels (especially in the Ripley Garden), the fountains, and the overall design all drew praise.

One woman, when asked about the information on the Ripley Garden labels, commented:

I think it's enough. As long as the consumer knows the name and they like it, [they can] go to their local garden shop, or whatever. That's what matters. And it does have the scientific and non-scientific name on it. So that's perfect actually.

A man from Philadelphia noted:

They're very helpful to me, yeah. You can see I'm writing down things.

A young woman admitted:

I enjoy that [Ripley] because usually it would say the names of the different plants and they are always very beautiful and I like to actually look at them and see what the names are, even [though] I don't think I could give you any right now...

Visitors who had been to both the Ripley and the Haupt gardens tended to emphasize the intimacy and special character of the former. As a young woman said:

It's a little bit more secluded and it's not so much in the open as [it] is over here [Haupt] and so you can find a bench and sit and be alone and it's really nice.

... I guess that I would say that that garden [Ripley] seems that it has a wider variety in plants and flowers, maybe because they are labeled and you can actually see they are all different... but yeah, I guess that is just a wider variety, and it's just that they are trying more to give you more of a variety of different flowers, whereas the rest of the gardens are just trying to make it beautiful...

The fountain in the Ripley Garden, as well as the Fountain Garden portion of the Haupt Garden, was appreciated. A mother visiting with her young daughter was quite enthusiastic:

I just liked the whole setup. I like the benches, I like the fountain, the benches around in the shade, and I really liked that everything is labeled.

An eight year-old, a budding ornithologist, said:

I love the birdbaths and fountains. It is a good place to be. I'd like more trees that attract more animals. I've seen birds and squirrels, but I love to observe animals. They need gardens.

A few visitors referenced the relationship between the gardens and the buildings and the importance of having them. A member of a group of women commented:

Oh I think it's great. I mean the buildings are not meant to be seen in their bare bones settings. They need a garden to look right. Especially ones like this [Arts & Industries]... more traditional buildings ... Maybe some of the other buildings are a little more austere on the outside, but I really love this. And of course there's also some historical type plants here too. They go with the whole style of these buildings. It's a very ... I mean, the Mall is kind of bare, I mean obviously it's constantly trod and empty and needs to be open I guess, but this is really nice. It's a great little place to come and sit and enjoy and get ideas.

A volunteer at a Smithsonian museum said of the Haupt Garden:

It's not bad; it's pretty good I think. It goes well with the Smithsonian Castle; the design, it is consistent with it.

The landscape architect compared the two gardens:

Well, [the Ripley Garden] gives you more of an intimate approach with the narrow alleyway that leads to the building [and] the trees cascading in the narrowness of the space, versus [the Haupt Garden]. You know [the Ripley Garden] is opening to a smaller building where [the Haupt Garden] is opening more in scale... to the main building here.

Finally, perhaps because they are accustomed to D.C.'s federal environment, both the first interviewee and a local group of women, retired from the government, alluded to the 'worth' of the gardens in dollar terms:

I love the fountains too. Just sitting and listening to the running water in a place like this. That was that whole audio tour I just took... there were all these different sounds and talking about the fountains. It really is part of the beauty of it. Not just the flowers, but the water and the plants together. Definitely worth the time and money. Tax dollars well spent!

Visitor Comment Cards

Visitors to the Ripley Garden have the opportunity to offer comments and suggestions by means of comment cards available in a plastic bag attached to the sign announcing the 2 p.m. garden tours that is located in the middle of the garden. Over a four-year period, HSD staff collected nearly 400 visitor comment cards.

The cards query visitors on whether they have been to the Ripley Garden before and if so, how often; whether they work nearby; the reason why they came; whether they found the labels useful; and what would add to their enjoyment of the garden. The comment cards also ask for date and time of visit, gender, and residence.

It is important to note that since completion of the comment cards is a self-selecting process, they do not constitute a random sample of visitors to the Ripley Garden. Aside from self-selection, a multitude of reasons makes the cards a tenuous source of data. Clearly data from the cards cannot be generalized to the population of garden visitors. For example, for those who included their gender on the comment cards (8 of 10 respondents), data show that slightly less than three-fourths are women. Given that of all Smithsonian visitors, about half are women,⁹ we have no way of knowing whether this means that female visitors are more inclined to visit the Ripley Garden, or simply that more women took the time to fill out cards.

With that caveat in mind, the comment cards contain a wealth of information on visitors' uses of and feelings about the Ripley Garden.

Reflecting seasonal visitation to the Smithsonian, nearly half the cards were filled out during the summer months (July, August, September), following by considerably fewer and nearly equal numbers in spring (April, May, June) and fall (October, November, December). Few visitors filled out comment cards during the coldest months of January, February, and March. About three-fourths of the cards were filled out in the afternoon, perhaps suggesting more leisurely visits.

Almost half of the visitors who filled out comment cards reside in the Washington, DC metropolitan area (including suburban Maryland and Virginia) and/or indicated that they work nearby. Very few were foreign visitors.

⁹ Smithsonian Institution, Office of Policy and Analysis (2004), *Results of the 2004 Smithsonian-wide Survey of Museum Visitors*, page 7.

More than half reported that they had been to the Ripley Garden before, suggesting either that the garden has a loyal following or that repeat visitors were more likely to fill out a comment card. Of those who answered that they were making repeat visits, about half reported coming between weekly and several times per year, and the remainder less frequently.

The Ripley Garden's fan base goes beyond the environs of Washington, DC. For example, comments were received from repeat visitors from:

- ✿ *Tacoma, Washington (Twice a year when I visit D.C... This garden is on my must visit list.)*
- ✿ *Cincinnati, Ohio (Once a year... I wouldn't miss it - Come every visit to Washington.)*
- ✿ *San Salvador, El Salvador (3-4 Times a year... Remarkable... What you've created here in such a limited space!)*
- ✿ *San Jose, California (This is my third visit. I only come when I'm in Washington D.C. I was seeking beauty and peace of mind.)*

Based on the visitors' stated reasons for coming to the Ripley Garden and other comments, three broad categories of 'use' can be defined:

- ✿ *Spiritual/aesthetic – values are peace and natural beauty*
- ✿ *Educational – value is horticultural knowledge*
- ✿ *Recreational – value is a place to exercise and enjoy the weather*

In many cases visitors used the garden in several ways. For example, as one person wrote:

Not only do I derive much pleasure from the beauty of the garden (as I have heard many visitors say), but I am constantly learning more about garden design as a result of my visits – learning about horticulture which I try to apply to my garden at home.

While it was not possible in some cases to parse out a pure reason for coming, a primary visit purpose was usually evident. As such, approximately two-thirds of the visitors who filled out comment cards came primarily for spiritual/aesthetic reasons and one-third came primarily for educational reasons. Recreational use was subordinate to the two primary uses.

Visitors who gave “spiritual/aesthetic” reasons come to the Ripley Garden for peace and tranquility and to enjoy the beauty of the flowers and plants. They come to find a quiet place – “an oasis in a noisy city” – to read, to eat lunch, or to take photographs. The garden is a place of respite to contemplate life and to temporarily escape its stresses and cruelties. Many in this group are regular and frequent visitors to the Garden; examples of their reasons for coming are:

- ✿ *Desire for a meditative moment*
- ✿ *[To] face an operation tomorrow. I came to my favorite place to cheer up!*
- ✿ *To celebrate with my grandchildren. (My tumor’s benign and healing up)*
- ✿ *I was seeking beauty and peace of mind.*
- ✿ *Need to get out of the office to clear my head and enjoy some nature.*
- ✿ *I make a point of approaching the Mall by way of this serpentine walkway, sometimes resting on the garden benches to enjoy this restful oasis. It is a treasure!*

Other commenters who fit in the spiritual/aesthetic use group, visiting the Garden for the first time, came upon it by “fortunate accident” and were drawn in:

- ✿ *The sound of the fountain.*
- ✿ *Happy accident - end of long day - on way to Vietnam Memorial... This is what a garden “should be” - a window to another world!*
- ✿ *I was on my way to the N.G.A. and was drawn in by the beautiful and diverse array... The breadth of selection and delightful landscaping made this enrapturing. Thanks! What a treat!*
- ✿ *Passed by and it looked lovely... Spectacular variety and blooming in November!*
- ✿ *The amazing planting caught my eye as I passed... Enchanting design and combination of plants.*
- ✿ *Sheer serendipity... What a thrill to stumble into such a pretty, interesting well-labeled garden. Thanks heaps.*

Visitors who wrote comments that implied an “educational” agenda range from amateur gardeners to horticulturists and landscape designers. Their primary interest in coming is to get information:

- ✿ *Check out what’s blooming and growing; plant combinations... The*

garden including containers is a joy. I've made many plant-buying and garden arrangement decisions based on its design.

- Check fall characteristics in light of mild weather... P.S. You heard me identify the bush with the small red berries. It's Coralberry – a.k.a. Buck Brush or Indian Currant.*
- Find name of plants seen before.*
- To check on what's blooming in this ever-lovely garden... I come here for ideas and love your loose design... Your use of textures is fabulous!*
- 2 PM tour - Ideas for own garden.*
- I am a horticulturalist at a Botanic Garden in Hales Corner, Wisconsin... Loved the Passionflower vines and Dutchman's. Very beautiful! Very interesting collection!*
- Tourists from Australia... I'm a landscape designer and this beautiful garden with identifying names is very useful for me. Thank you.*
- I'm a tourist... I got some great ideas and names of plants for my garden in Asheville, North Carolina.*

Appreciation of the labels was evident, as nearly everyone reported that they found the identifying labels useful.

Recreation was implicit in many of the comments, with the weather and exercise frequently linked with visitors' trips to the garden:

- Beautiful day - weather... Really appreciate your garden.*
- 79 degrees in October.*
- Great weather... My backyard is like the shady parts here. I came over for ideas.*
- Beautiful day, want to see what has come into bloom... Wonderful, wonderful resource and peaceful oasis.*
- The attraction of the tour garden on an overcast day - in more ways just as rewarding as spring and summer... When will "Amred's Promise" bloom?*
- Daily walk. It's one of the great joys of living in Washington D.C. Thank you.*
- A desire to walk, and be among flowers. Morning walk w/ our polite old dog... Thank you for your lovely oasis!*

- ✿ *Walking, exercising. I am a gardener. I get a lot of ideas from you. Thanks!*
- ✿ *Out for a walk... Rosemary smells super. The lavender smells so delicate.*
- ✿ *Biking past. Gets better each year. I think I'll plant beets next year on my balcony.*

About two-thirds of those who wrote comments reflected on the question, "What would add to your enjoyment of the Ripley Garden." More than half said *nothing* would add to their enjoyment:

- ✿ *It is perfect. I would not change anything.*
- ✿ *Nothing different. It was wonderful! Very inspiring. Thank you for the descriptions; especially what is hardy and not hardy. Keep up the good work!*
- ✿ *It is wonderful as is. The labels help me to work in my own garden. I got lots of ideas.*
- ✿ *It is divine as is! Thank you!*
- ✿ *Nothing - This is a magical garden! We had a lovely visit!*
- ✿ *Can't think of a thing.*

The remaining comments suggested *some additional things* that would add to their enjoyment.

Some wanted different kinds of plants:

- ✿ *More fragrant plants*
- ✿ *Sunflowers*
- ✿ *Maybe a lemon tree if it can grow in this climate*
- ✿ *It's magnificent as is. However, maybe edible and decorative section? Native plants section?*
- ✿ *Need some Native American species*
- ✿ *An herb garden to touch and smell*

Some wanted more information:

- ✿ *The labels are quite useful; however need more, especially through the daisy like flowers.*
- ✿ *Source of basic cultural information on plants; even more labels; more common names.*

- 🌿 *A more extensive website. (My neighbors cannot visit it, and I always rave about it!)*
- 🌿 *Zones of where the plants will survive*
- 🌿 *What is the name of the woody-stemmed plant with leaves that shade from mint green to rose located near the foxglove? It is fabulous.*

Some wanted more or different times for the tours:

- 🌿 *Opportunity to have a weekend garden tour for people who can only come on weekends.*
- 🌿 *An evening or weekend morning tour*
- 🌿 *Garden tour during lunch hour*
- 🌿 *More frequent tour or presence of the gardeners. I would love to talk with them.*



Some wanted to be able to get seeds or cuttings:

- 🌿 *A seed catalog*
- 🌿 *Ability to buy seeds, cuttings of interesting plants I can't find elsewhere. How about a plant sale?*
- 🌿 *To have cuttings or young plants off of what needs thinning*
- 🌿 *Would love seeds of Solarium Quietolence.*

Others wrote suggestions for various Garden enhancements:

- ✿ *It's as close to perfect as I can imagine...But perhaps a high transparent roof over a tucked away bench to facilitate garden watching in the rain.*
- ✿ *Sound of water*
- ✿ *Music*
- ✿ *More sculptures*
- ✿ *Tables for lunch*
- ✿ *Make it completely no smoking*
- ✿ *If it were bigger!*

Observations in the Gardens

During June 2005, an intern with OP&A conducted observations in both the Ripley and Haupt Gardens. The purpose of the study was to collect systematic data about Smithsonian garden visitors and the activities they engage in. During the month, data were collected in 32 different observation periods, between 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. From a total of nearly 4,800 visitors who were in the observation area, information was collected from about 170. Based on observational data, visitors to the gardens were quite similar to those visiting the Smithsonian in the summer.

People visiting the gardens engaged in a wide range of activities which, understandably, varied with the weather conditions. Activities included: strolling or walking through; using the gardens as background for photos, or taking photos of plants, flowers, and the surrounding buildings; sitting on benches; reading plant labels; and eating. For those who were eating, it was observed that approximately half had brought their lunch and half had purchased their lunch from the Smithsonian. Interest in the gardens appeared so high that even on a day with light rain there were people stopping to read plant labels and take a few pictures.

The layout, garden furniture, and plantings resulted in differences in the ways the gardens were used. For example, there was a fair number of people in the Haupt Garden who were using the benches and reading a newspaper or book. A higher percentage of visitors was taking photographs in the Haupt Garden compared to the Ripley. The Ripley Garden seemed to be a favorite spot to eat lunch. And, more visitors were

making contact with plants and flowers there – smelling, touching, discussing – compared to the Haupt Garden.

Two particular observations illustrate how the gardens are often the catalyst of and background for special moments. In the first observation, three Asian Buddhist monks wearing orange robes and their female

translator entered the Ripley Garden. Two monks sat down on a bench near the fountain while the third remained standing, reading the plant labels and conversing with the translator. One of the seated monks turned to a potted purple iris next to the bench, pulled the flower toward him and kissed it, “as if kissing a child.”

In the second observation, a mother and father and their young son were walking through the Haupt’s Fountain Garden on a sweltering summer day. The father stopped suddenly and ran through the water spout several times, getting soaking wet and coaxing his son to follow. His wife and son were laughing but the son did not want to get wet. He slowly leaned in the sprinkler, dampening his shirt, then, feeling how refreshing it was, he changed his mind and jumped over the fountain, repeating his father’s actions.



Summary

The interviews with visitors conducted in summer 2005 indicate that both the Ripley Garden and the Haupt Garden play important roles in their Smithsonian visits. They offer both psychological and educational benefits, encourage relaxation, and for some become an important part of their lives or visits to Washington, DC.

The data from four years (2001-2004) of visitor comment cards filled out in the Ripley Garden tell a story that is nothing short of a love story. As one person simply put it, “I love this garden, and I am grateful for all the work that goes into it. It is a peaceful, beautiful, and educational place. Thank you.”

People derive both educational and psychological benefits from their garden visits. Comments of people who come primarily for spiritual/aesthetic reasons reflect outcomes such as enjoyment, higher morale, and raised productivity:

🌿 Thanks for inspiring all my senses. I've been coming for 10 yrs. The last 3 yrs. have been most outstanding!

❧ *One of these days, I'll make it to your Tuesday tour, but in the meantime, just know that you make a real difference and boost the morale of a lot of people (and believe me, it's not just me). Thanks for everything you do.*

❧ *The garden provides a continuous source of delight and peace and makes me a more productive Govt. employee. The garden employees are obviously professional and make the place special.*

Educational outcomes for visitors include increased knowledge about particular species of plants and garden design inspiration. Many comments are directed to the garden's chief architect and horticulturist, Janet Draper, and the garden staff and volunteers:

❧ *The garden is beautiful - wonderful color, texture, sizes, shapes, and varieties. Janet is extremely knowledgeable and quite a teacher, answering all questions and sharing her knowledge. She is also very creative, imaginative, and energetic in her gardening.*

❧ *By the way, the tours are excellent. Like the garden, each tour is a whole new learning experience.*

❧ *The labels that you write are great! More of your "editorial" comments.*

❧ *Working a design for The World Trade Center Memorial site competition... I am utterly impressed and almost speechless – terrific job you've done. Would you be kind enough to call me? I need your advice on my project.*

❧ *Love the profusion and wonderful mixture of plants. Please don't ever make this a stuffy, formal place. Thanks for the pleasure of relaxing here! Does the monster parsnip have edible roots?*

The interviews with and comments from Ripley Garden and Haupt Garden patrons, as well as incidental visitors to the gardens, reference certain factors again and again that appear to inspire loyalty and deep emotional associations. These include the knowledge and expertise of the staff; the unusual and even rare species of plants; and the way the gardens are designed, both physically (with the fountains, wrought iron benches, walkways, and raised beds) and in the variety, color combination, and number of plantings. As one person put it, *"Stumbled upon it... Special specimens... Gorgeous! Gorgeous! Gorgeous!"* Or as another person observed, *"It is not your grandma's rose garden. Thanks for your efforts."*

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