

# Riverbanks Gardens South Carolina

-- Jim Delahanty

copyright © 2002 [Jim Delahanty](#)

Written permission of author is required for all use

---

**Riverbanks Zoo and Botanical Gardens** lay to the west of Columbia, South Carolina in the Piedmont region-- roughly the foothills or lower levels of the Blue Ridge Mountains of the Appalachian chain. The Saluda River bisects the site so that the Zoo is on the west bank and the Botanical Gardens lie to the east. A 700-foot bridge connects the two sites. A tram takes visitors from the Zoo area up to the Botanical Gardens Center; since the road from the Zoo to the Gardens is all uphill at a steep angle, many sensible parents have their children walk the distance so as to absorb youthful spirits.

**The Botanical Gardens** occupy a seventy-acre area and contain examples of the topographical areas of South Carolina with the formal gardens at the top of the bluff. A visitor center constructed about a decade ago anchors one end of a walled garden which stretches down a slight incline to the bottom where the rose garden anchors the other end. In the center of this walled garden is a



300-foot watercourse with water wheels, fountains, lagoons, and other aquatic forms that provide both aural and visual cooling effects. These are a blessing in the middle of July when both the temperature and humidity hover in the upper nineties. Red-bricked walkways separate the various sub-gardens from the water channel as well as from each other. The sub-gardens range from a traditional Knot garden with varying shades of green from lemon thyme to feverfew to a tropical garden featuring hot oranges, and reds. A special treat is the midnight garden, the traditional white garden with plants that produce cooling colors and fragrance for nighttime appreciation.

**At the entrance to the rose garden** a covered structure provides relief from the sun and catches whatever breeze might be present on any given day. The rose garden exits to a wooded trail leading down to the ruins of a historic textile factory. The walls of the garden support mostly Noisette climbers that soar to twenty and thirty feet with the aid of wires and wooden posts. The walkways are studded with benches and arches. A central kidney shaped area provides space for China and low growing Tea roses.

**The rose garden features** roses likely to be 'found' in South Carolina in both senses of the word; found in the sense of commonly displayed and happy within the climate, but also 'found' in the

sense of being re-discovered in cemeteries, churches and farms. The latter usually reflect in the names the location or the person associated with the find or re-discovery. The rose garden contains primarily Noisettes, Chinas and Teas with a smattering of Polyanthas, Floribundas and highly unexpected Gallicas (**Crimson Gallica**, **Tuscany** and **Cardinal Richelieu**). There is no spraying for disease or insects. Nor do the roses exist in some kind of artificial vacuum. They are surrounded by underplantings, companion plants and what rose purists would call 'weeds.' The emphasis is on the garden aspect of 'rose garden' rather than the rose collection aspect of 'rose garden.' A very short listing of some of the striking companion plants includes:

- **strobilanthes dyerianus**-a four-foot shrub with green purple leaves topside and purple beneath, and pale blue flowers.
- **salvia 'Sapphire'**-a four-foot tall sage with dark leaves but with gentian blue flowers.
- **verbascum arcturus**-a member of the mullein family, at the end of three foot spikes greenish daisies appear with maroon centers; the flowers fade to yellow.
- **allium sphaerocephalum**-aka Drumsticks, red-purple globular spikes at the tip of two foot stalks.
- **berberis thunbergii 'Rose Glow'**-a medium size barberry with bronze and red foliage.

**The website for the Riverbanks Zoo and Gardens** ([www.riverbanks.org](http://www.riverbanks.org)) boasts that the Noisette collection is among the largest in the world. This is as it should be, since Noisettes were first produced in Charleston about one hundred miles toward the Atlantic coast. And almost all of the popular names in that class of roses are on display. '**Crepuscle**' climbs up one side of a wooden bench abutted by 16-foot timbers; the flowers are an incredible peach yellow fading toward gold and resemble the circle handles on old-fashioned chests. On the opposite side '**Belle Vichyssoise**' exhibits clusters of twenty blooms of the palest of pinks. '**Celine Forestier**' rests against the back wall displaying flowers the color of clotted cream. '**Clair Jacquier**', an 1880 rose, soars thirty feet into the air on guy wires. Champney's Pink Cluster, Nastarana, Alister Stella Gray, Blush Noisette, and Narrow Water are all present. Only '**Marechal Niel**' is missing; given the legendary status of the rose in the South, perhaps no sufficiently vigorous specimen could be found. However, there are Noisettes not necessarily to be located in the Combined Rose List or Modern Roses 11. One such rose is "**Cemetery Rose Chester County**," which has canes of up to fifteen feet covered with light pink clusters nestled in mid green oblate and serrated foliage. "**Cato's Pink Cluster**," another found rose, displays tiny pink pompom type flowers in clusters of three to five on a two-foot high bush. "Beaufort" shows whitish blooms of around 8 petals in clusters of five or more; it is almost indistinguishable from its three foot high companion, "**Youngher's White Cluster**." Behind these plants appear the startling blue spears of the '**Sapphire**' salvia. "**Oaklyn**" is another white Noisette with one inch white blooms on a moderately sized bush. And there is "**Glen Lula**," which most resembles the Perle D'Or in color and habit, but whose identity remains a mystery.

**In the China beds the 'found' roses** outnumber the customary representatives such as Louis Philippe, Cramoisi Superieur, and Jean Bach Sisley. Those with a less pedigreed provenance include "**Spice**", a spare foliaged bush with white blooms not unlike those of Irene Watts; it catches the eye at every turn of the path. "**Anson St. Church**" has white blooms about 2 inches across; however, it is lush-leaved in contrast to the usual sparse China foliage and it rises about a foot and a half above the ground. Roses such as "**Old Dutch Fork Monthly**," "**Tiny Prince**,"

and "**Charleston Pacific**" bloom away in the manner of the red petal white eye China strain. "**Phalaenopsis**" offers single bright pink clusters of an enormous size and seems perfectly sited with the Chinas; however, it is classified in MR11 as a Floribunda but CRL2000 notes that some consider it a Polyantha. Other found roses in the Polyantha class include such beauties as "**Lavender Pink Parfait**," "**Sweet Pea**," and "**Ruth's Single Pink**."

**Two other roses could not be ignored, though neither was a China or a Noisette:**

- "**Conrad Ferdinand Meyer**:" This Hybrid Rugosa has silvery pink flowers and canes that sprout up some 8 to ten feet. The thorns along the canes recall the ocotillo cacti used to build corrals in the early Southwestern days. As a hedge it would enable intruders to hemorrhage to death while inhaling a most delicious rose scent.
- "**Madame Antoine Mari**:" This silvery pink Tea also possesses a delicious scent. The progression from long elegant pointed blended dark pink bud to blush pink fade delights both the eye and the nose.

**For a visitor from Southern California** the effects of the southern sun can be found in the fact that "**Maggie**," a seven foot sprawling bush in my Sherman Oaks garden tops out at four feet here; and the pinkish blooms of '**La Marne**' are clearly a bleached white.

**If you are ever within driving distance of Columbia, South Carolina,** this rose garden, completed in 1997 with Donations from Antique Rose Emporium, Roses Unlimited, Garden Concepts and Vintage Gardens, is worth a detour. One other attraction is that the garden is extremely well tended and carefully tagged so that you do not wander wondering 'what was that?'

Jim D