

THE BOTANIC GARDENS OF SRI LANKA

(A Revised and Enlarged Edition)



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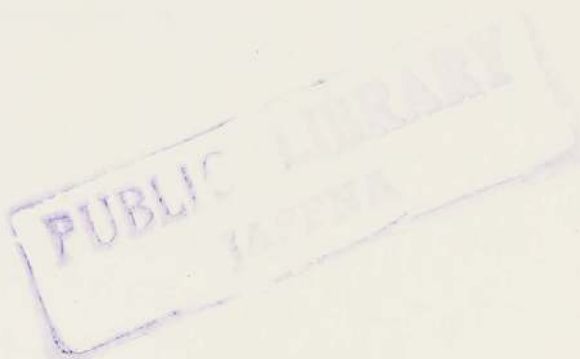
D.T.EKANAYAKE B.Sc. (Hons.)
Former Director, Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya

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Cover photo:

Coleus Border and Flower Garden of Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya

Contents

	Page No
The History of the Botanic Gardens of Sri Lanka	4
Admission	8
The Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya	8
Situation, Extent & Climate.	8
Introduction of the Gardens	9
The Flowering and Ornamental Trees	9
Spice Garden	13
The Orchid Collection	14
Indoor Plant Collection	14
Flower Garden and the Fernery	18
Collection of Ornamental Shrubs and Vines	19
Collection of Fruits and Edible Plants	19
Palms and Palm Avenues	23
Memorial Trees	24
Arboretum	27
Bamboos	28
The Lake and Rockery	28
Medicinal and Student's Gardens	29
Pinetum and the Collection of Cycads	29
Strange and Remarkable Plants	30
Gardens Buildings and Monuments	31
The National Herbarium	32
Nature's Gigantic Bouquet and Daintiest Blossoms	32
The Botanic Gardens, Hakgala	37
The Botanic Gardens Henarathgoda (Gampaha)	43

THE HISTORY OF THE BOTANIC GARDENS OF SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has a long Botanical History. Paul Herman, a medical officer and a Dutch Botanist of German descent who later became the Professor of Botany at Leyden, collected plants while he was in Ceylon from 1672 to 1676. They were studied after his death by Burman who published an account of them in his *Thesaurus zeylanicus* in 1737. This herbarium came in to the hands of Linnaeus in 1745 and using it as a basis, he published an account of Ceylon plants in his *Flora Zeylanica* in 1747. In this work, plants are arranged according to the system of classification proposed by himself and thus, Sri Lanka has the unique honour among tropical countries of possessing a Linnean flora written by Linnaeus himself.

The Dutch maintained an interest in the botany of Ceylon through out their occupation. Well-known botanist like C. P. Thunberg, professor of Botany at Uppsala University, collected plants in Ceylon from 1777 to 1778. Thus in the eighteenth century plants of this country and the peculiarities of her flora were widely known and this may have been a major reason for the establishment by the British of Botanic gardens in the country.

The very first botanic garden, however, was established by the Dutch in Colombo, but after the British took possession of the island was sold by the government. In 1810 Sir Joseph Banks, then President of the Royal Society advised the Colonial Government to open a new botanic garden in Colombo and accordingly, a seven-acre garden was established under the name of "Kew" in Kew Road, Slave Island, with William Kerr as the first Superintendent in 1812. In the year 1815, the garden was moved to Kalutara where it was established in an unsuccessful sugar-cane plantation of 600 acres at Uggalboda. In the following year Kerr died and was succeeded in 1817 by Alexander Moon who contributed much to the improvement of the Kalutara garden. In 1821 the Colonial Government instructed Alexander Moon to select a suitable site in Kandy for a botanical garden since the climate there was found to be more favourable for such a venture. Accordingly he selected the present site which was once the Royal Garden of the Kandyan Kings.

The history of the site dates as far as 1371 when King Wikrama Bahu iii ascended the throne and kept court at Peradeniya. Later, in the reign of King Kirthi Sri from 1747 to 1780, the site was made a Royal Garden and from 1780 to 1798 King Rajadhi Rajasinghe resided therein. A Vihara and Dagaba were built by King Wimala Dharma, but they were demolished by the British in 1815. Several traces of old buildings and monuments of the Kandy period have in fact been found near the present Superintendent's bungalow. Some ruins of the Dagaba can be seen in the Flower Garden.

The available evidence indicates that the Royal Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya were instituted in February, 1822 and Alexander Moon became their first Superintendent. In addition to his pioneering work on the establishment of the gardens, Moon published his *Catalogue of the indigenous and Exotic Plants Growing*


in Ceylon” in the year 1824. This work contains the botanical and native names of 1,127 plants indigenous to the island. The transfer of exotic plants from the garden at Kalutara was made by successive superintendents upto 1843. But between 1824 and 1844 the Gardens were somewhat neglected until the appointment in that year of George Gardner as Superintendent. Only 40 acres of the 147 acres were in cultivation when Gardner took charge. He effected many important improvements in the conditions of the Gardens, but his chief work was the exploration of the island and the collection and description of her flora. However, he was not destined to complete it, for he died at Nuwara Eliya in 1849 at the early age of 37.

The Royal Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya became widely known early in their history mainly because of plants of botanic and economic value and from publications. In this respect, Sri Lanka is much indebted to the services of two Directors of the Botanic Gardens, G.H.K. Thwaites (1849-1880) and Henry Trimen (1880 – 1896) whose combined efforts in systematic botany and plant introduction extending over a period of nearly 50 years, brought much fame to this institution, culminating in the publication in 1895 by Trimen of his monumental work, “*The Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon*”. Trimen himself published the first three volumes while the last two volumes were published from Trimen’s notes by Sir J.D. Hooker, after Trimen’s death in 1896. In 1864, Thwaites published a catalogue of Ceylon plants entitled “*Enumeratio Plantarum Zeylaniae*” after discovering several new plants during his excursions. He prepared a series of herbarium sheets of Ceylon plants, sets of which were distributed to the principal herbaria in Europe while one set was retained for the National Herbarium at Peradeniya.

From 1850 to 1890 the introduction and acclimatization of plants were carried out with much vigour and with many successes. Among other species then introduced many be mentioned Rubber, Cacao, Cinchona, Vanilla, fruits, vegetables, flowers many shade and timber trees; while the spread and cultivation of tea and spices like clove and nutmeg was also largely helped by the introduction of improved varieties through the Botanic Gardens.

Coffee was probably introduced into Sri Lanka from Indonesia by the Dutch and in 1845 Peradeniya supplied seedlings of the Arabian variety to estates. Later in 1873 Liberian coffee was introduced from Jamaica. Towards the end of Thwaite’s career as Superintendent coffee estates were ravaged by the deadly coffee leaf disease, *Hemileia vastatrix*, and the Colonial Government commissioned the services of Harry Marshal Ward, a mycologist of great renown in England at the time, to study the disease. However, all efforts made to control it were unsuccessful and the coffee industry in the island collapsed completely.

The establishment of the Hakgala Garden by Thwaites in 1861 marks the introduction of cinchona to the island. Seeds of *C. succirubra* and *C. calvisaya* were obtained and the site of the present Hakgala Gardens was selected as a cinchona nursery for experimental trials. In the year 1876, a total of 1,224,000 plants were distributed and cinchona became a lucrative industry. This was entirely the creation



of the Botanic Gardens from supplies of seeds and plants obtained from Markham's mission to Peru. However this industry became unremunerative with keen competition from India and Indonesia and it gave way to tea.

Tea was introduced to Sri Lanka prior to the year 1828 and was grown in the Kalutara garden. In 1839 Wallich the Director of Calcutta Botanic Gardens sent seeds of the then newly discovered Assam Tea to the Peradeniya Gardens. Assam hybrid variety was distributed from Hakgala Gardens in 1870 from planting material obtained in 1867. Tea was first made for sale in 1872. It came from loolecondera Estate, the planting material for which was obtained from Peradeniya.

The entire rubber industry in South East Asia owes its plants to seeds or stocks from Botanic Gardens in Sri Lanka. Sir Henry Wickham was commissioned by Kew Gardens in England to obtain seeds of para rubber, *Hevea brasiliensis* from Brazil. He collected 70,000 seeds from the Tapaïos plateau which were taken to Kew. Here 7000 seedlings were raised from these seeds, of which 1919 plants were dispatched to Ceylon in 1876. The present site of the Henarathgoda (Gampaha) Gardens was selected by Thwaites as suitable for raising these plants. Material from the original stock was distributed for planting in estates in both Ceylon and countries of South East Asia.

Another industry which owes its existence in Sri Lanka to the Botanic Gardens is the Cacao industry. This plant is not mentioned in literature prior to the publication of *Moon's Catalogue* in 1824. Plants had been introduced as early as 1834 from Trinidad, and Thwaites encouraged the cultivation of Cacao in 1880 with the introduction of a consignment of highly prized varieties from Trinidad. Seeds from these varieties were distributed to estates for cultivation.

Other crops introduced through the Botanic Gardens were camphor in 1852, nutmeg (reintroduced in 1804) , vanilla in 1853 and a large number of valuable trees such as mahogany in 1888, sandalwood in 1869, *Albizzia moluccana* in 1880 and dadap, *Erythrina lithosperma* in 1852. Several fruit trees such as the Durian from Malaysia in about 1850, and cherimoya in 1882 were introduced by the Botanic Gardens.

During Trimen's directorship, botanists of the calibre of Professor F.O Bower, K.Goebel and G.Haberlandt visited Ceylon to carry out scientific investigations. Trimen was succeeded by J.C. Willis as the Director of the Peradeniya Gardens in 1896. His scientific work was mainly confined to taxonomy and ecology, and problems dealing with the distribution of species and evolution which found expression in publications such as the "*Flora of Ritigala, a Study of Endemism*". These studies enabled him later to enunciate the "Age and Area" theory of evolution.

While the work at Peradeniya in the early years was mainly directed towards botany and the acclimatization of plants, activities in later years favoured agriculture and economic botany. This led eventually to the setting up of the Department of Agriculture in the year 1912, after the retirement of Willis in 1911. With the establishment of the Department of Agriculture, the botanic gardens became a Division of the Department.



H.F. Macmillan, who had joined the Gardens as a curator in 1895, was appointed as the Superintendent of Botanic Gardens and Head of the division in 1912. Curators with a purely horticultural background were appointed to administer the Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya, Hakgala and Henarathgoda, and were in turn responsible to the Superintendent of Botanic Gardens. T.H. Parsons assumed responsibility as Curator, Peradeniya Gardens in 1914. This major administrative change of turning the Botanic Gardens over to purely horticulture work at the expense of wider botanical pursuits was considered unwise by several authorities in the past. However, the gardens were improved and extended by Macmillan. His greatest achievement while in service was the publication of the comprehensive book "*Handbook of Tropical Planting and Gardening*", which went in to several editions and reprints. Macmillan retired in 1925 and T.H. Parsons continued as Curator until 1945. Parsons set up the student's Garden and the Garden of Medicinal Plants and published several papers on horticulture. Besides his responsibilities as Curator of the Botanic Gardens, Parsons pioneered scientific fruit culture in the island.

During World War II the Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya became the Headquarters of the South East Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander. During the war years, only a portion of the Gardens was open to visitors, yet despite the large number of military units and buildings put up the damage to the plant collection was negligible. All the military buildings were demolished during rehabilitation extending from 1946 to 1960 with the exception of the operations and map rooms of the Allied Commander (on the left hand side of the Main Border facing the Great Circle Lawn which is an Education Centre today).

After the retirement of T.H. Parsons in 1945, D.M.A. Jayaweera who had joined the Gardens as an Assistant Curator in 1942, became the Superintendent of Botanic Gardens on his return from training at Kew Gardens, England. Mr. Jayaweera retired at the end of 1971. He made two valuable contributions, firstly by revising the family Orchidaceae for the "*Revised Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon*" and secondly by the publication of a book entitled "*Medicinal Plants of Sri Lanka*" (in 4 volumes).

Mr. D.T. Ekanayake who joined the Botanic Gardens as an Assistant Superintendent in 1952 succeeded Mr. Jayaweera in 1972. During his superintendency several new horticultural features were added and in particular the Orchid Section underwent enlargement with the addition of a new orchid show—house. The principal horticultural contributions made during this period were "*A Handbook for Cut-flower Growers*" and "*A Guide to Urban Planting*". The Gardens also issued several booklets on the cultivation of anthuriums and orchids. Mr. Ekanayake retired at the end of 1983 as Deputy Director of Agriculture in charge of the Division of Botanic Gardens.

Mr. D.B. Sumithrarachchi succeed as the Deputy Director after retirement of Mr. Ekanayaka and later become the Director, National Botanic Gardens. He improved the Gardens tremendously. Dr D.S.A. Wijesundara assumed duties as the Director in 1998 and continued till 2006. The Department of National Botanic Gardens was established on 23rd August 2006 and Dr.D.S.A. Wijesundara was appointed as the first Director General.

Since 1912 the activities of the Botanic Gardens have been mainly directed to the development of ornamental horticulture in the island. During the first half of the last century, the introduction of or improvements to such ornamental plants as *Hibiscus*, *Canna*, croton, *Ixora* and *Bougainvillea* were made while the years after 1950 were mainly devoted to the hybridization and improvement of anthuriums and orchids. During the last decades of the last century, these activities have been intensified with the Botanic Gardens undertaking a research and development project on the breeding and production of anthuriums, orchids and indoor plants for an export-oriented flower and plant industry. Better laboratory and a new orchid show-house were constructed under this programme. Several landscape improvement projects were implemented at Peradeniya and Hakgala Gardens. In view of the renewed interest in herbal drugs, a medicinal garden was established at Ganewetta in the intermediate zone where a large number of herbs used in Ayurvedic medicine are grown.

A Cafeteria was constructed in 1976 to serve the many visitors both local and foreign who visit the Peradeniya Gardens throughout the year. This cafeteria serves meals and light refreshments daily from 8.00 a.m to 6.00 p.m. Sri Lankan lunches are supplied while western cuisine is available as an option.

Admission

All Botanic Gardens are open daily from 7.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. An admission fee is charged for persons, Buses, motor cars, motorcycles, push bicycle, vans, coaches and lorries are not permitted to enter the Garden.

THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, PERADENIYA SITUATION, EXTENT & CLIMATE.

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya are located about 100 km (68 miles) to the east of Colombo at an elevation of about 472m (1550 ft.) on the main trunk route from Colombo to the former royal city of Kandy just 6.5 kms (4 miles) away. The Gardens are set in a horse shoe-shaped curve of the longest river in Sri Lanka, the Mahaweli, which cascades down from the central mountains; they occupy about 60 hectares (147 acres) of slightly undulating land.

The climate is most equable, the mean temperature being about 25^o C (76^o F). Rainfall is equally distributed, averaging 2286 mm per year. The months of April and May which precede the onset of the south -west monsoon are relatively hot. The south-west monsoon generally bursts towards the end of May bringing wind and rain and lasts until August. The north-east monsoon commences in October with much rain towards the afternoon, and the last ten weeks of the year are generally wet. The temperature gradually falls to a mean of 23^o C (74^o F). The period from January to

March is the driest part of the year; the mornings in January are cool and crisp with the temperature sometimes falling as low as 14°C (58° F).

The best time to visit the Gardens is probably the period from January to April when most of the tropical flowering trees, shrubs and vines are blooming. They are seen at their best with their multi-coloured flowers silhouetted against a clear blue sky. Even otherwise, one must not miss seeing this 60 hectare paradise of refreshingly green tropical trees shrubs, vines and gorgeous avenues of towering palms at almost any time of the year.

INTRODUCTION OF THE GARDENS

Skirted by the curving river, with views of mountains to the south and jungle covered hillside to the north, the setting of the Botanic Gardens is unmatched.

Inside, spacious lawns and arbored walks vie with avenues overhung by creepers or-bordered by palms, groves of giant trees and a lake in the shape of Sri Lanka itself.

There are gardens of roses, ferns, spices, medicinal plants and herbs, together with greenhouses of orchids, foliage plants, cacti and succulents. Along the river's edge grow in clumps of Giant bamboo while everywhere the contrasting shapes and colours of trees; shrubs and vines delight the visitors' senses.

The Gardens contain about 4000 species, varieties and cultivars of ornamental and useful plants both indigenous and exotic, from all parts of the Tropics. Four and a half miles of drive and one and a half miles of foot-paths intersecting the drives render all parts accessible to those desiring to explore the many beauties of these Gardens.

In the map of the Gardens provided, the most interesting places and plants are numbered and indexed for the convenience of visitors. Short summaries of the important features and main plant collections of the Gardens are given below.

In comparison with other botanic gardens in South and South-East Asia, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya, stand out as the best maintained botanic gardens in the region; their nearest rival being the Bogor Botanic Gardens in Indonesia which were established during the same period. The Gardens at Peradeniya are listed as one of the Great Botanic Gardens of the world in scientific literature.

THE FLOWERING AND ORNAMENTAL TREES

The Gardens hold a fine collection of tropical and ornamental trees. Most of them come into flowering during the dry months in the first quarter of the year, while a few flower during the south west monsoon and just afterwards.

Of the flowering trees, the Pride of Burma or orchid Flower (*Amherstia nobilis*) of Burma is the finest. These trees line the main road, on the Kandy side. They produce pretty pink and yellow flowers on large hanging clusters all the year round. A remarkable feature of the tree is the long, brownish-pink drooping clusters in which the young leaves appear. In addition the visitor should look for the Flamboyant or Flame tree (*Delonix regia*) of Madagascar, a gorgeous tree in full blossom, bearing immense sprays of scarlet or orange flowers during the months of April and May; the Queen Flower/Pride of India or 'Murutha' (*Lagerstroemia speciosa*) of India and Sri Lanka, bearing at the ends of branches large erect clusters of mauve or pink flowers from April to July or later; the Indian Lamburnum or 'Ehela' (*Cassia fistula*), a small flowering tree native of Sri Lanka and India, bearing masses of yellow flowers in pendulous clusters in July or August; the Pink Cassia (*Cassia nodosa*) of E. Bengal and Malaysia bearing a profusion of bright pink and rose scented flowers in large sprays during May and June; the Horse Cassia (*Cassia grandis*) of S. America producing a profusion of pale pink flowers during February or March; *Cassia moschata* of Tropical America bearing to clock-work precision in March pendulous sprays of orange to salmon-pink flowers and *Cassia spectabilis* producing at the ends of branches, large erect spikes of stinking yellow flowers in the months from August to October.

Another group of flowering trees growing in the Gardens, the tabebuias are very showy and spectacular when in flower. The Pink Tecoma (*Tabebuia pentaphylla*) of Mexico is a medium-sized erect tree producing in March or April when the tree is devoid of all leaves, lovely masses of pale mauve flowers. The yellow Trumpet Tree (*Tabebuia serratifolia*) of Brazil brightens the day with its deep yellow flowers produced after leaf-fall during the months of March or April; *Tabebuia spectabilis* of Venezuela produces masses of yellow flowers in lax sprays and the Mauve Trumpet Tree (*Tabebuia gayacan*) of Panama bears masses of mauve flowers in mid December or early January when the tree is devoid of leaves

Other beautiful flowering trees are the "Na" tree or Ironwood (*Mesua ferrea*) of Sri Lanka and India with bright crimson coloured young leaves, bearing scented white flowers in April and May; the Yellow Poinciana (*Peltophorum pterocarpum*) of Sri Lanka and India producing masses of yellow flowers about twice a year at irregular intervals; the Fountain Tree or Tulip Tree (*Spathodea companulata*) of Africa bearing bright orange scarlet flowers during the rainy months; the Rose of Venezuela (*Brownea grandiceps*) which bears bright red flower heads that are often 15 cm across and the Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia blakeana*), one of the most beautiful flowering trees with orchid-like, fragrant rose-purple flowers.

There are many outstanding ornamental trees in the Gardens' collection, but one that the visitor should not miss the giant umbrella-like tree (*Ficus benjamina*) known as the Java Fig or Java Willow, a handsome low-spreading specimen of which adorns the Great Lawn opposite the Cafeteria. The structure of the branch-spread when viewed from under the tree is fascinating, covering an area of about 1,500 square metres of lawn space.



Coleus Border, Nibung Plam



The Main Entrance
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The Main Drive of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya



Other remarkable trees are the Tembusu tree of Malaysia (*Fagraea fragrans*), a symmetrical tree producing pale yellow fragrant flowers, of which a splendid cone-shaped specimen in the Flower Garden is trimmed annually to make it more remarkable; the Cook Pine (*Araucaria cookii*) of New Caledonia, an avenue of which is seen along the River Drive bordering the Great Lawn and giant specimens of Queensland Kauri Pine (*Agathis robusta*), a tall stately tree, but with a sombre appearance and a bulky trunk.

SPICE GARDEN



Near the Main Entrance to the Garden on the right-hand side is the Spice Garden, a spot favoured by the foreign visitor. Here is a representative collection of spice plants among which may be noted the nutmeg or "Sadikka" (*Myristica fragrans*), a native of the Moluccas. The oldest specimens are over 125 years old and still bearing. The nutmeg fruit splits open when mature displaying the brown seed enclosed within a red aril, known as the mace. The kernel, surrounded by hard shell, is used as a spice flavoring and as a cure for stomach complaints, while the mace is used only as a spice. The outer fleshy covering of the fruit is excellent for making jellies. The Cinnamon or "Kurundu" (*Cinnamomum verum*) is a very popular spice, one of the chief minor export crops of Sri Lanka of world-wide demand. The natural habit of the cinnamon plant is a tree as the specimens in the Gardens demonstrate, but for commercial purposes, it is grown as a bush to produce cane stems. The Cinnamon of commerce is the dried bark peeled from these cane stems, while Cinnamon oil is obtained by the steam distillation of bark and leaves for use in the manufacture of perfumery and drugs.

The Clove or "Karabu neti" (*Syzygium aromaticum*) is a small tree from Molluccas, now grown on a commercial scale in Sri Lanka as a home garden crop. The clove is essentially the unexpanded flower bud picked green and browned by sun drying. A very aromatic oil distilled from it is used as an antiseptic in medicine and also in the manufacture of soaps. There is also the Allspice or Pimento of commerce, (*Pimenta dioica*) of the West Indies of which the unripe but full grown dried berries are used as a meat tenderizer. The leaves are used in flavouring curries. The Bay tree (*Pimenta recemosa*) yields an aromatic oil from its leaves which is used in the manufacture of a hair lotion called Bay-rum. The Cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*) is another important export crop of Sri Lanka. It is a herbaceous perennial grown commercially under forest canopy, bearing ovoid fruit-capsules on flower stalks arising from the rootstock. These capsules bear a number of small aromatic seeds used in food, as a masticator and in medicine. Other spices and condiments grown here are the Calabash nutmeg (*Monodora myristica*), and pepper (*Piper nigrum*). The pepper plant is a vine and it is usually grown over natural or artificial supports. Berries or peppercorns are produced among the branchlets and when they attain a reddish colour, they are picked and sun-dried. Both "black and white" pepper come from the same plant; when ground with the outer covering left on, they form 'black pepper' and when deprived of this covering, the white.

The collection also include aromatic grasses, *Vanilla* and condiment plants.

THE ORCHID COLLECTION

One of the main attractions to both the overseas and the local visitor is the Orchid House, which is a striking new structure, cantilevered and provided with a "Bat-wing" fiberglass roof. Here are exhibited hundreds of captivating blooms of ornamental orchids. The orchid family is the largest of the flowering plants consisting of about 20,000 species, the greater number originating in the wetter parts of the tropics. Most of these orchids are epiphytic in habit, living on branches of trees but not as parasites. The plants are very specialized, obtaining their water requirements from the humid atmosphere and nutrients from humus collected around their roots. Hybrids are possible between closely related species and genera. Some hybrids are the result of three or even four genera and are grown in tropical countries for the cut flower trade.

The blooms displayed in the orchid house belong to ornamental genera such as *Arachnis*, *Cattleya*, *Dendrobium*, *Epidendrum*, *Oncidium*, *Phalaenopsis*, *Renanthera* and *Vanda*.

It is impossible to list all interesting species and hybrids but among them are *Oncidium* var. "Golden shower" locally called the "Kandyan dancer" because of the resemblance of its lip petal to the form and costume of a kandyan dancer; (*Oncidium papilio*, a species with curious flower resembling a butterfly or moth with canary-yellow and red margined petals and *Epidendrum* 'Rainbow' hybrids of various colours, where the tiny flower resembles a cross. Depending on the season the visitor may observe the Holy Ghost orchid or Dove orchid (*Peristeria elata*) producing an immaculate white flower, the central column with its wings resembling a dove and *Stanhopea* Spp. with a remarkable pendulous inflorescence of bright yellow, fragrant flowers.

The lawn, a little beyond the orchid house, adjoining the Flower Garden is landscaped with orchids. Here the visitor can see, depending on the season, the Giant Orchid of Malaysia in flower (*Grammatophyllum speciosum*) producing, erect racemes about 1 ½ - 2 metres high and bearing a large number of conspicuous ochre-yellow flowers blotched with brown, and the Green orchid (*Coelogyne meyeriana*) producing jade-green flowers more or less throughout the year.

INDOOR PLANT COLLECTION

Near the orchid house is situated the Plant House which has a representative collection of foliage or indoor plants. The cultivation of indoor plants has become very popular during recent years both in the tropics and temperate countries. They are actually plants belonging to the under growth or are epiphytes growing on trees or boulders in tropical wet ever green forest. Foliage plants are remarkable for their unique forms and colorful leaves.



Vanda Orchid Flowers



Dendrobium Orchid Flowers



The Cactus House



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The Orchid House with the 'Bat-wing' Roof



Spices

(1) Cinnamon

(2) Cardamom

(3) Nutmeg

(4) Mace

(5) Pepper

(6) Clove

In the Plant House are displayed a wide collection of "Rex" begonias and African violets in pots, while colourful bromeliads, ferns, episcias and other epiphytic types are exhibited in hanging baskets and pots. Plant House is also devoted to a display of bromeliads and anthuriums (*Anthurium andraeanum*) of red, white, orange, pink and bicour types. Anthuriums are good cut-flowers lasting for three to four weeks in a vase. Tropical ferns and popular indoor plants such as aglaonemas, dieffenbachias, philodendrons, calatheas, peperomias, pileas and several other attractive plants are also displayed.

A few metres away from the Plant House is situated the Cactus House, where about 800 species of cacti and succulent plants are skillfully displayed. The main genera here are *Opuntia*, *Cereus*, *Echinocactus*, *Epiphyllum*, *Rebutia*, *Crassula*, *Euphorbia*, *Aloe*, *Haworthia*, *Kalanchoe*, *Sedum* and other xerophytes.

FLOWER GARDEN AND THE FERNERY

Of all the beautiful places in the Gardens, the Flower Garden, where visitors from many countries mingle with local people and the lily pond (in the centre of the round-about near the Orchid House) are a particular focus of attention. Visitors first admire the red water lily (*Nymphaea rubra*), which opens its flowers in the night and closes up as the day advances. Their gaze then turns to the striking vista of the Flower Garden before they walk down the broad path through the vista, flanked by two ribbon borders consisting of three colourful *Coleus* varieties blending harmoniously with borders of the variegated grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and alternate plantings of two *Alternanthera* varieties. This path leads to the Octagon House, draped with Tropical Ivy (*Ficus pumila*) which provides the shade and coolness necessary for the plants grown within it. The undulating lawns in the Flower Garden are dotted with flower beds displaying a wide range of flowering annuals and perennials. On the left-hand side of the *Coleus* border is the Nibung palm (*Oncosperma tigillaria*), while on the right-hand side, a little distance away, stands the conical Tembusu tree (*Fagraea fragrans*) already described. The striking large shrub planted on either side of the second path (leading to the Octagon house on the right) is the Song of India (*Pleomele reflexa* var. *Variegata*), the leaves of which are banded with golden yellow. From the Octagon House, the path leads to the Fernery flanked on one side by the striking variegated hibiscus (*Hibiscus* var. *Show Flake*) and by a small Japanese garden on the other.

The Fernery was originally laid out in 1861 and has since been extended. It is a delightful place shaded by lofty trees draped with woody climbers, epiphytes and creepers. Over 100 species of ferns grow amidst the maze of foot-paths. The gracefulness of their foliage makes ferns very popular as indoor plants. Species grown here include *Adiantum* (Maidenhair fern), *Angiopteris*, *Davallia* and *Nephrolepis* while the beds are lined with the fern-like *Selaginella*.

COLLECTION OF ORNAMENTAL SHRUBS AND VINES

The Gardens possess a wide collection of ornamental shrubs ranging from the very popular *Bougainvillea*, *Hibiscus*, *Croton*, *Poinsettia* and *Ixora* to rarer tropical shrubs like Powder Puff Tree (*Calliandra haematocephala*) with crimson, Powder-puff-like flowers; the Bottle-Brush plant (*Callistemon lanceolatus*) from Australia with long cylindrical spikes of bright red flowers resembling a bottle-brush; the Scarlet Mussaenda (*Mussaenda erythrophylla*) with an enlarged deep scarlet calyx lobe and star-like creamy white flowers; the flowering Banana (*Heliconia collinsiana*) with bright red lobster-claw-like keels enclosing bright yellow flowers and the very rare wild *Poinsettia* of the West Indies (*Warscewiczia coccinea*) the enlarged sepals of the flowers of which are bright red and form a large spray.

Equally impressive is the Gardens' collection of tropical vines. Notable are the Congea (*Congea velutina*) with its showers of mauve-pink blossoms; Petrea or Sand Paper Vine (*Petrea volubilis* var. *volubilis*) producing bluish-violet flowers which cascade from its branches; the Bengal Trumpet (*Thunbergia grandiflora*) with the loveliest lavender-blue flowers; the Honolulu Wood Rose (*Merremia tuberosa*), a vine which spreads rampantly and of which the flower on drying produces a seed pod with persistent sepals like a carved and polished wooden rose; the Cats'-claw climber (*Macfadyena unguis-cacti*) which in March or April produces masses of bright yellow flowers draping tall trees in the Gardens; the Camoensia (*Camoensia maxima*) a heavy vine producing large, white scented flowers; and also rarer vines such as the Wax Flower (*Hoya* Spp.) producing large clusters of wax-like, white flowers with pink centres and the New Guinea Creeper (*Mucuna bennettii*) producing hanging clusters of large, brilliant red flowers.

COLLECTION OF FRUITS AND EDIBLE PLANTS

Edible fruit trees are found in many parts of the garden, but a concentration of such trees is found in the Fruit Plot situated on either side of the Palmyrah Palm Avenue. There are the mango (*Mangifera indica*) of India and Malaysia which is much relished by Asians and Westerners; the Durian (*Durio zebethinus*) of Malaysia, the edible fruit of which is large and spiky; inside is a creamy custard with a disagreeable smell which is relished for its aphrodisiac properties; the 'Sapodilla' or Chiko tree (*Manilkara zapota*) has a sugary, soft, pale brown fruit with large shining black seeds inside; the 'Rambutan' (*Nephelium lappaceum*) of Malaysia producing clusters of bright red or orange-yellow fruits, covered with soft spines, containing a large seed surrounded by an edible white pulp; the Avacado (*Persea americana*) much relished by Westerners; the Litchi (*Nephelium litchi*), (the large trees in the Gardens have not produced fruits so far); the Brazil nut (*Bertholletia excelsa*) of Brazil, producing fruits with a woody brown shell enclosing several closely packed seeds which are the Brazil nuts of commerce, besides many other fruit trees of minor importance.



Yellow Trumpet tree (*Tabebuia serratifolia*) with Bouganvillea Shurbs



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A Row of Java Almond (*Cannarium commune*) Trees



The Flower Garden



Java Willow (*Ficus benjamina*) Tree with the
National Herbarium in the Background
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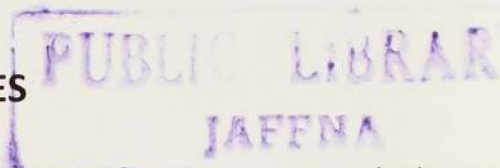
Double Coconut (*Lodoicea maldivica*)



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Giant Bamboo (*Dendrocalamus giganteus*)

The Jak-fruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) is of interest to visitors from temperate climates. There are two beautiful specimens of Jak trees in the Spice Garden. The enormous fruits, some of which may weigh up to 20 or 25 kgs are borne on the trunk and old branches. They are usually oblong, irregular in shape and covered with spiny fleshy Knobs. Botanically, the Jak is classified as a multiple fruit consisting of a common receptacle containing a large number of fruits.

PALMS AND PALM AVENUES



The palms are another group of plants which hold the interest of visitors, particularly those coming from temperate climates. The great family of palms is almost exclusively tropical, only a few species growing in temperate latitudes. Not only do they grace the landscape but they supply man with an inordinate number of products; food, shelter, clothing, building materials, fiber, starch, sugar, paper, wine, oil, wax, fuel and dyes.

There are about 200 species of palms in the Gardens, of which the most curious is the Double coconut palm (*Lodoicea maldivica*), two rows of which adorn the Monument Road on the left-hand side of the Main Drive. The Double coconut or 'Cocode-mer' is a native only of the Seychelles, a small group of islands in the Indian Ocean. This palm has separate male and female trees with immense leaves. The large bi-lobed or tri-lobed fruits were known for centuries before the palm itself was discovered; sailors of old found them floating in the Indian Ocean. The Gardens have both male and female plants in the collection. The male inflorescence which resembles a long tail, about two to three feet in length, has a curious mousey smell. When the male and female palms grow a considerable distance from each other, the female flower has to be artificially pollinated. The fruit takes about 8 to 10 years to mature and the seed over one year to germinate.

Another interesting palm is the Nibung palm of Indonesia (*Oncosperma tigillaria*), a specimen of which stands prominently in the Flower Garden. It is a clump-forming palm with tall, slim trunks covered with spiky needles and a crown of elegant feathery leaves. It seems that during its evolution the Nibung palm has developed sharp needles on the trunk to keep monkeys and other predators from picking its fruits; nature's way of ensuring the survival of the species.

Other interesting palms in the collection in the Palmetum are the Betel nut palm (*Areca catechu*); the 'Kitul' or Toddy palm (*Caryota urens*); the Sealing Wax palm (*Cyrtostachys renda*) whose bright red leaf-sheaths makes it very conspicuous; the African oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*); and the Talipot palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*). This is about the largest of all palms native to Sri Lanka and India. Growing to a height of 20-25 metres, it produces giant, fan-like leaves used for olas (a substitute for paper in ancient writing), umbrellas and sunshades. At the age of 30-40 years it produces an enormous cream-white inflorescence, 5-8 metres in height upon the summit of the stem, and when the fruits ripen, the plant dies.

There are also palms of the genera *Phoenix*, *Sabal*, *Livistona* and *Dictyosperma* to name only a few.

There are three Palm Avenues in the Gardens; the oldest, the Palmyrah palm Avenue (*Borassus flabellifer*), was planted in 1887. The Palmyrah Palm is a native of Africa introduced to Sri Lanka many years ago. It is now widely grown in north Sri Lanka, where it rivals the coconut palm as a source of food and as an alcoholic beverage. The sap is fermented to make toddy or boiled and prepared as jaggery. The most graceful avenue is the Cabbage Palm Avenue (*Roystonea oleracea*) first planted in 1905 and replanted in 1998. These palms, natives of Panama, are about 20-25 metres in height and they derive their name from the swollen base of the trunk. The third avenue is the Royal Palm Avenue (*Roystonea regia*) replanted in 1950, these natives of Cuba are considered to be one of the most beautiful of the palms.

MEMORIAL TREES

The custom of planting memorial trees around the Great Circular lawn in the Gardens to commemorate visits of Royalty, Heads of State and religious dignitaries and events of national importance dates back to the Colonial era, and still continues today.

The first tree to have been planted in pursuance of this custom is the Bo-tree (*Ficus religiosa*) venerated by Buddhists as the "Bodhi" and under which Lord Gautama Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment. A branch of the original tree in India was brought to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. and planted at Anuradhapura. The specimen in the Gardens was planted in 1875 by King Edward VII. The second oldest Memorial tree is an Ironwood tree (*Mesua ferrea*) planted by the late Czar of Russia in 1891.

Other memorial trees planted in the first half of last century are a Cannon ball tree (*Couroupita surinamensis*) planted by their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary in 1901; a Pink Tecoma (*Tabebuia rosea*) planted in 1919 by Mrs. F.A. Stockdale, wife of the late Director of Agriculture to commemorate the end of World War I; a 'Munamal' tree (*Mimusops elengi*) planted in 1922 by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales; the Amherstia or Pride of Burma (*Amherstia nobilis*) planted in 1925 by the King Of Belgium and a Tamarind Tree (*Tamarindus indicus*) planted by the late Rt. Hon. D.S. Senanayake, first Prime Minister of Ceylon, to commemorate Independence Day, on 4th February 1948.

Since 1950 many memorial trees have been planted by great personalities and it is beyond the scope of this guide to describe all of them. A cross section of the plantings by great personalities is given below.

Among the commemorative plantings around the Great Circle are a Sapu tree (*Michelia champaca*) planted in 1959 by H.E. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of India; a *Tabebuia guayacan* tree planted by H.R.H. Prince Mikasa of Japan in 1956; a



The Royal Palm (*Roystonea regia*) Avenue



The Cabbage Palm (*Thryx paraguayensis*) Avenue
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Thembusu tree, Cat's claw climber



Flower Garden with Salvia Beds

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'Gotu Nuga' (*Ficus krishnae*) planted by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II in 1954; a *Tabebuia spectabilis* tree planted by the late H.E. Chou-En-Lai, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China in 1957; an 'Ehela' tree (*Cassia fistula*) planted by H.M. Mahendra Bikram Shah Dev, King of Nepal, in 1957; a Flamboyant (*Delonix regia*) planted by Rt. Hon. Walter Nash, Prime Minister of New Zealand in 1958; a *Bauhinia variegata* planted in 1967 by the late Hon. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India; a 'Nedun' tree (*Pericopsis mooniana*) planted by Yang Teremat mulia Tenku Abdul Rahman Putra Al Haj Prime Minister of Malaysia in 1967; a *Cassia nodosa* tree planted by Kurt Georg Kiesinger, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1967; and a Calabash nutmeg (*Monodora myristica*) planted by H.E. Field Marshal Mohamed Ayub Kahn, President of Pakistan in 1965.

Among plantings are a Sandalwood tree (*Santalum album*) planted in 1977 by H.E. J.R. Jayewardene, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; an Indian Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) planted by H.M. Birendra bir Bikram Shah Dev, King of Nepal in 1981 and an Asoka tree (*Srcaca asoka*) planted in 1981 by H.R.H. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, near the Orchid House. Among the planting in the gardens are a Shorera affinis tree by former Director General of Agriculture, Dr. S.S.B.D.G. Jayawardena, a Ruk tree (*Horsfieldia iryaghedni*) by former president of Sri Lanka H.E. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in 2005 and a Mee tree (*Madhuca longifolia*) by H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in 2009.

ARBORETUM

Beyond the Great Circle lawn is situated the Gardens' Arboretum of about 22 hectares (55 acres), the outer perimeter of which extends right up to the river's edge. The Arboretum contains well over 10,000 trees belonging to various genera and species of broad-leaved, evergreen hard-woods introduced from the tropics of both hemispheres. Every tree carries a label giving scientific name, local name if any and the country or origin. The Arboretum can be casually viewed from a distance, but much the best way to get a close look at the trees, many of which are very old, is to walk along the River drive which skirts the Gardens on three sides, or to follow the footpaths.

Many of the best tropical hard-wood trees are, represented here. There are the Jak or Kos tree (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) an excellent timber, yellow when fresh but becoming dark red with age, which is every where in the Arboretum; the Satinwood or 'Burutha' (*Chloroxylon swietenia*), a native of Sri Lanka, yielding a hard wood which is satin-yellow with beautiful markings, to be found near the Royal Palm Avenue; the Ebony or 'Kaluwara' tree (*Diospyros ebenum*) also a native of Sri Lanka with a hard black heartwood, a specimen of which is growing near the Circuit Bungalow; the very rare Calamander-wood tree or 'Kalumedirya' (*Diospyros quaesita*) of Sri Lanka with fancy markings, a specimen of which is growing near the Fernery; the Teak tree (*Tectona grandis*) of Burma yielding one of the most important commercial timbers,

specimens of which are growing along the River Drive in Section C of the Arboretum; the Mahogany (*Swietenia mahagoni* and *Swietenia macrophylla*), two species yielding Cuban Mahogany and Honduras Mahogany respectively, found growing around the Great Circle and near the Cabbage Palm Avenue and many other indigenous and introduced timber trees. The Arboretum also holds other tropical trees which yield among other products, drugs, gums, resins, tans, fibers and dyes.

The Arboretum has contributed in no small measure to the conservation of plants, for in it are preserved several species of trees which are said to be extinct in the wild state.

BAMBOOS

The river banks in particular, attract the visitor's attention with the clumps of bamboos of various kinds planted there. They serve as means of curbing soil erosion while at the same time adding a distinct charm to the surroundings.

Bamboos belong to the grass family and consist of about 200 species, ranging from stiff reeds to giant species such as *Dendrocalamus* with shoots over 50 m tall and up to 25 cms in diameter. The common yellow bamboo planted along the river (*Bambusa vulgaris*) is used in the construction industry for scaffolding. Bamboos are also used for building houses and making rafts, musical instruments, toys and vases, while the young shoots of certain species are eaten as a vegetable.

One of the most significant bamboos in the Gardens' collection is the Giant Bamboo of Burma (*Dendrocalamus giganteus*) a fine clump of which is seen at the turn off to the South Garden from the River Drive. The stem attains a height of about 30 m, while the base measures about 20-25 cm. New shoots appear during the monsoon rains in June and July and grow at the rate of about 25-30 cm a day reaching their full height in about 2 to 3 months. Groups of visitors standing by the side of these giant clumps look like Lilliputians. Another plant which resembles the Giant Bamboo is the Building Bamboo of Java (*Gigantochloa apus*), clumps of which are also seen along the River Drive. This bamboo can be easily distinguished by its brownish coloured nodes. There are several other species of graceful bamboos in the collection in the South Garden, of which a notable species is the Black bamboo (*Phyllostachys nigra*).

THE LAKE AND ROCKERY

By taking the Lake Drive, on the left side of the Main Entrance, the visitor comes to the ornamental Lake, laid out in the shape of the map of Sri Lanka, with an island in the centre. The lake is almost covered with the white flowered variety of the Sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*). Both the white and red varieties grow in the

'tanks' or man-made reservoirs in northern Sri Lanka. The sides of the Lake are planted with marsh plants of which a notable species growing here is the Papyrus of the Nile (*Cyperus papyrus*). The solitary bamboo clump on the bank of the Lake is the green bamboo (*Dendrocalamus membranaceous*).

The steep bank along the River Drive opposite the lake is landscaped to form a rockery, and is planted with both flowering and ornamental herbs and shrubs.

MEDICINAL AND STUDENT'S GARDENS



The southern end of the Gardens beyond the Lake is known as the South Garden and can be reached by the road at the south end of the Lake. The Medicinal Herb Garden is situated on the left-hand side of this drive near the Talipot palms.

Over five hundred plants are used in the indigenous and Ayurvedic systems of medicine practised in Sri Lanka, and of these 300 species are grown here. They are arranged in beds according to their respective families, the plants in this collection consists of herbs, shrubs and climbers, while tree species used in medicine are to be found in the Arboretum. Of the drug plants, the western visitor may find the following interesting: 'Ekaweriya' or Sarpagandha shrub (*Rauwolfia serpentina*) of India and Sri Lanka which has been known since ancient times as a antidote for snake-bites; (Within the past 40 years, it has been shown to produce alkaloids some of which, like reserpine, lower arterial blood pressure); the 'Adhatoda' or Vasaka shrub (*justicia adhathoda*) of India and Sri Lanka commonly used as an expectorant in bronchitis; the 'Iramusu' or Indian Sarsaparilla creeper (*Hemidesmus indicus*) used as a diuretic and the 'Attana' or Datura shrub (*Datura stramonium*) which yields a narcotic drug.

A little distance from the Medicinal Herb Garden, the drive ends in a wide oval loop in which amidst many palms is situated the Student's Herbaceous Garden. This is laid out in the form of a broad leaf in which the central walk represents the mid-rib and the beds, radiating from the central walk, represent the nerves of the leaf. Here about 500 species of herbs and shrubs of Sri Lanka and other tropical countries are arranged according to plant families, for the benefit of students of botany.

PINETUM AND THE COLLECTION OF CYCADS

Coniferous trees which are especially abundant in higher latitudes or montane regions are well represented in the Gardens. The Pinetum is situated in the South Garden behind the Palmetum and crown the top of the hill. It can be reached by two foot-paths, one deviating from the Lake Drive at the extremity of the herbaceous border and the other leaving the South Drive near the Lake.

Here are grown several species of the genera *Agathis*, *Araucaria*, *Cupressus*,

Juniperes, Pinus, Podocarpus and *Thuja*. On the slope of the hill behind the Medicinal Herb Garden are two splendid specimens of *Gnetum gnemon* of the order Gnetales. They are regarded as a link between coniferous and flowering plants. Besides the Pinetum, coniferous trees are found in other parts of the Gardens. Around the Great Lawn are several giant specimens of *Agathis robusta*, the Queensland Kauri pine, which are the largest of the Gardens' trees. Along the drive leading to the National Herbarium are specimens of the tall stately looking conical-shaped *Araucaria cookii* commonly called the Cook pine, and a specimen of a Monkey-puzzle tree (*Araucaria bidwillii*). These coniferous trees constitute some of the most graceful and striking trees in the Gardens.

Along the upper loop of the South Drive near the student's Garden stands the Cycad collection. The Cycads were abundant during the late Carboniferous and early Mesozoic eras after which they declined, leaving, at the present time a single family with about 9 genera and less than 100 species. The living forms are mostly tropical and sub-tropical in distribution and are commonly called 'Living fossils'. The vegetative structure of Cycads is fern-like, but some genera like *Cycas* resemble palms in outward appearance. The genera represented in the collection are *Cycas*, *Encephalartos*, *Dioon* and *Zamia*. Some of the specimens are very old and strange, even monstrous, in appearance.

STRANGE AND REMARKABLE PLANTS

The Gardens possess a large number of remarkable trees with strange and curious flowers, fruits and outgrowths. These oddities often become the objects of interest to tourists from overseas.

Beside the foot-path which runs alongside the orchid nursery, stands a row of giant trees known as the Java Almond or Kanari Nut (*Cannarium commune*), a handsome tree of Malaysia. These trees possess remarkable buttress roots. They are often so large and humped that a section cut out could be used for a cart wheel. The fruits, which turn a dark purple-black when ripe, contain a kernel that tastes like an almond and are edible raw or roasted.

Along the River Drive near the orchid nursery stands a row of magnificent, large Cannon-ball trees (*Couroupita surrinamensis*) of South America. These trees produce large, waxy, cream and pink, sweet scented flowers on long woody stalks arising from the trunk. These are followed by the large, brown, globular, hard-shelled fruits which resemble cannon balls and contain pulp of an unpleasant odour. The numerous dangling, fruiting stalks give the tree a ruffled appearance.

By the River Drive in Section E (see map) and near the Suspension Bridge are two medium-sized spreading Sausage trees (*Kigelia africana*) from W. Tropical Africa bearing large pinnate leaves. The large, dull purplish, bell-shaped flowers hang down on cord-like stalks. They open in the night and are said to be pollinated by bats. The remarkable, grey, oblong, gourd-like, grey fruits weighing 4-5 kg hang on long cords

from the branches for many months. These strange sausage-like fruits are not edible, but are used in African medicine for external application.

Beside the summer house near the Royal Palm Avenue stands a Baobab (or Judas) tree (*Adansonia digitata*) from East Africa. This tree is naturalized in the Mannar and Puttalam districts of Sri Lanka. The Baobab is one of the largest and longest lived trees in the world. Although the Gardens specimens are not very big, in their natural surroundings the girth of the trunk increases to as much as 25 m in circumference, often becoming hollow and capable of holding over 1000 litres of water. It is one of Africa's most useful trees, the leaves, bark and fruits being edible and also used as cordage, paper, cloth and medicine.

By the side of the Lake Road near the Main Entrance and near the Rockery are specimens of small, evergreen African trees, named after Napoleon Bonaparte and known as Napoleon's Crown or Napoleon's Button (*Napoleona imperialis*). The tree bears remarkable flowers hidden by the leaves, each with a five lobed reddish-purple cup bearing a double crown of stamens. The outer row has about 35-40 filaments while the inner is more rigid and has yellow filaments rimmed with purple. The flower bears a resemblance to the Passion flower.

Beside the Great Circle Lawn near the Mahogany tree is a specimen of the Calabash tree (*Crescentia cujete*) of South America. It is a small tree with a short trunk and spreading branches. Underneath the crown the large, oval smooth-shelled fruits which turn first yellow, then brown. These shells can be beautifully polished and carved into ornaments and musical instruments like the maracas. The fruits can be trained to assume various shapes by tying them when green and young.

By the Main Drive on the left-hand side is a small tree known as the Candle Tree (*Parmentiera cereifera*) from Panama. The tree bears on the main trunk and larger branches cylindrical, fleshy candle-like fruits which are 30-40 cm long and resemble hand-made candles. The fruits have a waxy texture and a pungent fragrance. The flowers are greenish-white in colour.

GARDENS BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS

There are several old buildings and monuments within the present Gardens. One of the most impressive buildings is Gardner's Monument constructed in 1855 on a hillock, at the end of the Monument Road. Built in the style of a Greek temple, this dome-shaped structure is dedicated to the memory of George Gardner who was Superintendent of the Gardens from 1844 to 1849.

On rising ground overlooking the Great Circle lawn and partly covered by trees, is situated a monument of Kandyan architectural design dedicated to the memory of Dr. G.H.K. Thwaites F.R.S., Director of the gardens from 1849 to 1880. It is now used as a summer house by visitors.

The Dutch-style building standing on the slope above the drive leading to the National Herbarium is the oldest residential building for the Director of the Botanic Gardens in the 19th century; it later became the Head Office of the Department of Agriculture. It is now attached to the National Herbarium. This building was constructed in the precincts of a Buddhist temple that existed there before the British occupation of Kandy.

THE NATIONAL HERBARIUM

The Colonial style building that stands on the upper extremity of the Great Lawn houses the National Herbarium of Sri Lanka. Well over 200,000 herbarium sheets of the Flora of Sri Lanka and foreign lands, including the historic collection of G.H.K. Thwaites and known as C.P. (Ceylon Plants) are preserved. Here in recent years the collection has been greatly enriched by the addition of new collections made by expert botanists for the Smithsonian and British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) Revision of the Flora of Ceylon Project. The prior permission of the Systematic Botanist is necessary to view the National Herbarium and its collections.

NATURE'S GIGANTIC BOUQUET AND DAINTIEST BLOSSOMS

Peradeniya Gardens possess some outstanding plants the blooms of which are large in magnitude or carry dainty blossoms. In some special cases blooms appear very rarely, once in 30 or 40 years. Such is the case of the Talipot palm.

1. Talipot palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*)

It is no exaggeration to state that the world's most gigantic bouquet is found here in Sri Lanka. The majestic Talipot palm also indigenous to South India, grows in our wet zone, ascending to about medium elevations around Kadugannawa, Kandy and Matale. The trunk of this palm attains a height of 15 – 25 m at maturity, its diameter is about 1 m.

This palm is a fan-leaved monocarpic plant, which means that it blooms only once in its life time and then dies. The Talipot produces massive umbrella-like leaves which measure to a size of about 5 m at maturity. During the growing period lasting for about 30 – 40 years, massive food resources, chiefly starch are stored in the centre of the stem known as the pith. These reserves of food are used in the final event of flowering and fruiting before the death of the plant.

The massive terminal flower cluster (Inflorescence) is approximately 7 – 10 m tall and just about the same width. It is 2 – 3 times larger than Sumatra's giant aroid flower (*Amorphophallus titanum*) said to be the world's largest "Flower", but botanically, it is also an inflorescence or flower cluster. In the Talipot the individual flowers are small, creamy-white in colour: it is said that a faint milky or mousy scent

emanate from the flower cluster. Folk-lore has it that this rare event is inauspicious or unlucky for the locality. No wonder, the flower cluster is seen flowering above all other vegetation, including coconut trees and so forth; it is seen from a great distance.

The tender leaves of the Talipot were important to the ancient Sinhalese as a source of writing paper similar to what papyrus meant to the ancient Egyptians. Strips of tender Talipot leaves after processing were used by Buddhist monks for writing Pali and Sinhala scriptures, while Sinhalese physicians used them to preserve prescriptions and Astrologers for writing horoscope or birth charts. This ancient writing paper is known as Ola leaves or Puskola. This tradition lives on to the present time in certain places.

After the seeds are dispersed or fall down on the ground, the palm dies; beginning with the collapse of the crown of leaves once the cluster is developed. The seeds of the Talipot are similar in size to marbles and are hard; they are used to make ornaments and curios.

Processed leaves of the Talipot were used in the past as umbrellas and sunshades by village folk. Today leaves are used for fans used by Buddhist monks during preaching and chanting practices. They are also used for ornaments and weaving of large drying mats and baskets in villages. Several adult Talipot palms can be seen forming an avenue in the South Garden beyond the Lake. No one knows, you may be lucky to see a flowering Talipot on the way to Kandy from Colombo.

The daintiest blossoms

2. Bauhinia vine (*Bauhinia kockiana*)

A woody climber from the forests of Sumatra, was introduced into Sri Lanka comparatively recently. The climber should be grown over a strong pergola or fence. It has bilobed leaves and grows under full sunshine, but the roots need a shady spot. The vine grows fairly rapidly and blooms at moderate intervals. Flowers are about 3.5 cm in diameter produced in sprays called racemes; their colours ranging from bright scarlet through orange to yellow. They are closely packed and very showy. It is a gorgeous sight when the vine is in full blossom, which the visitor should not miss.

3. New Guinea Creeper (*Mucuna Bennettii*)

This stout, twinning climber is found in the Peradeniya Gardens besides the Coleus border, growing on a tree grown in the back border. It has tri-foliolate leaves. The flowers are about 15 – 18 cm long and unsymmetrical. They are borne in pendulous large clusters which are drastically modified to attract insects. Petals are like upturned beaks; coloured brilliant red and beautiful. The climber comes into bloom about 3 times a year. It is indigenous to the forests of New Guinea.

4. Jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*)

It is a strong twine indigenous to the forests of Philippines; it has tri-foliolate leaves. The creeper is suitable for planting in a strong pergola. Here too, the petals are strongly modified to attract insects for pollination. They are similar to upturned beaks. The flowers are large, coloured in subtle shade of jade –green, hung on the vine in long, about 1 cm long or more in length; each individual flower is about 5 cm long. Sometimes under shade flowers take on a metallic greenish-blue tinge. Despite the fact that, the vine is now grown in most of the tropical botanic gardens and private gardens of the world, this particular jade colour is perhaps the rarest in the plant kingdom. Therefore, foreign visitors from cooler climates are advised to inquire from tourist guides or Gardens authorities whether the Jade Vine would be in bloom at the time they visit the Botanic Gardens. It is well worth seeing it, if not seen earlier.

5. Hanging heliconia (*Heliconia collinsiana*)

This plant is similar to the well-known crabs claw or Lobster Claw (*Heliconia braziliensis*), but the flower cluster is not upright; it is hanging. The plant is a clump consisting of several individual plants and the leaves are paddle-shaped. It is a plant of the Banana family; flowers are small, yellow in colour, hidden inside the sheaths or brightly coloured bracts, which are crab-claw shaped and are bright red in colour. The entire cluster or inflorescence hangs down gracefully towards the ground. The plants can be seen around the plant house area.

6. Oncidium Golden Shower

It is locally known as the Kandyan Dancer. The genus *Oncidium* belongs to the great Orchid family and is confined to tropical Central America, down to South America and over to the West Indies. The petals of the flower are highly modified. The variety 'Golden Shower' is a hybrid where the standard petal is small, triangular hooded and coloured brown. The two brown wing petals on the sides are slightly larger, almost triangular, but upturned towards the outside. The 2 large keel petals are confluent forming the lip which is the largest segment. It is similar to a puffed-up skirt and is golden yellow in colour. The entire flower denotes the picture of a Kandyan dancer, hence the common name. The flower cluster is fan-shaped and the flowers are lovely and dainty.



New Guinea Creeper (*Mucuna bennettii*)



Jade Vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*)
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Talipot Palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*) with Flowers



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Bauhinia (Bauhinia lacinata)

THE BOTANIC GARDENS, HAKGALA

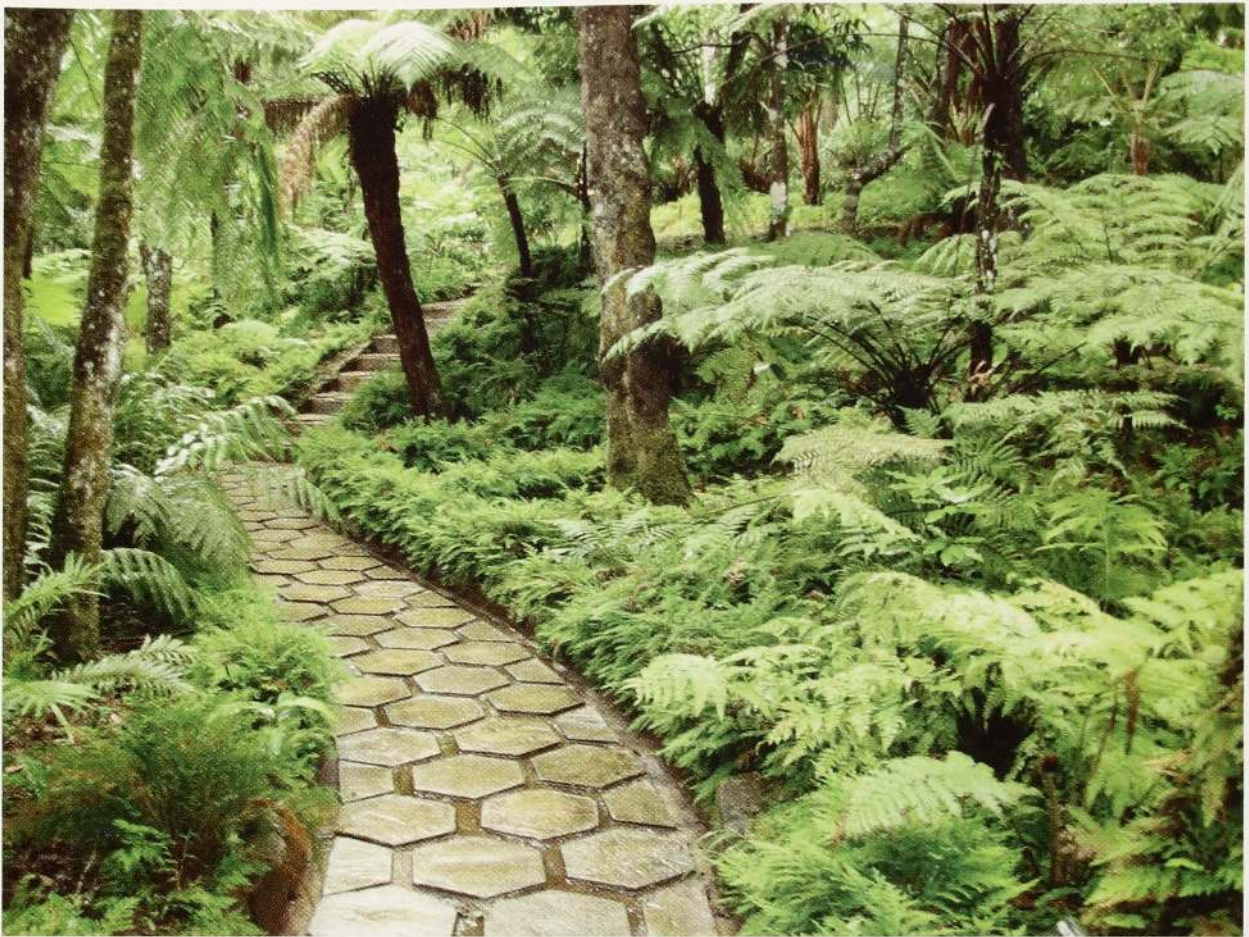
The drive from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya passes through the grandeur of some of the most dramatic natural scenery in all Asia. As the contour of the land rises rapidly the vegetation changes in unison and leaving behind the rice fields, coconut groves and rubber trees of the lowlands, one comes to the centre of tea-growing in Sri Lanka; high hills clothed in an evergreen mantle of confluent tea bushes. Panoramic views of majestic beauty succeed one another as the ascending road winds its way over the hills and through the Ramboda Pass until it reaches the plateau on which stands Nuwara Eliya, the hill resort, at an elevation of 1850 m or 6,200 ft. During the month of April, the affluent from the Colombo region flock to this resort area to escape the heat of the lowlands.

Six miles south-east of Nuwara Eliya, along the road to Badulla and under the shadow of the Peak of Hakgala (meaning 'elephant's - jaw rock') lie the Botanic Gardens. Their elevation of between 1800 – 1900 m (5600 & 6000 ft.) above the sea makes them possibly, the highest-set botanic gardens anywhere in the world. Rainfall averages 2260 mm falling on 2 out of 3 days a year, while the mean annual temperature is 15.5° C (60° F).

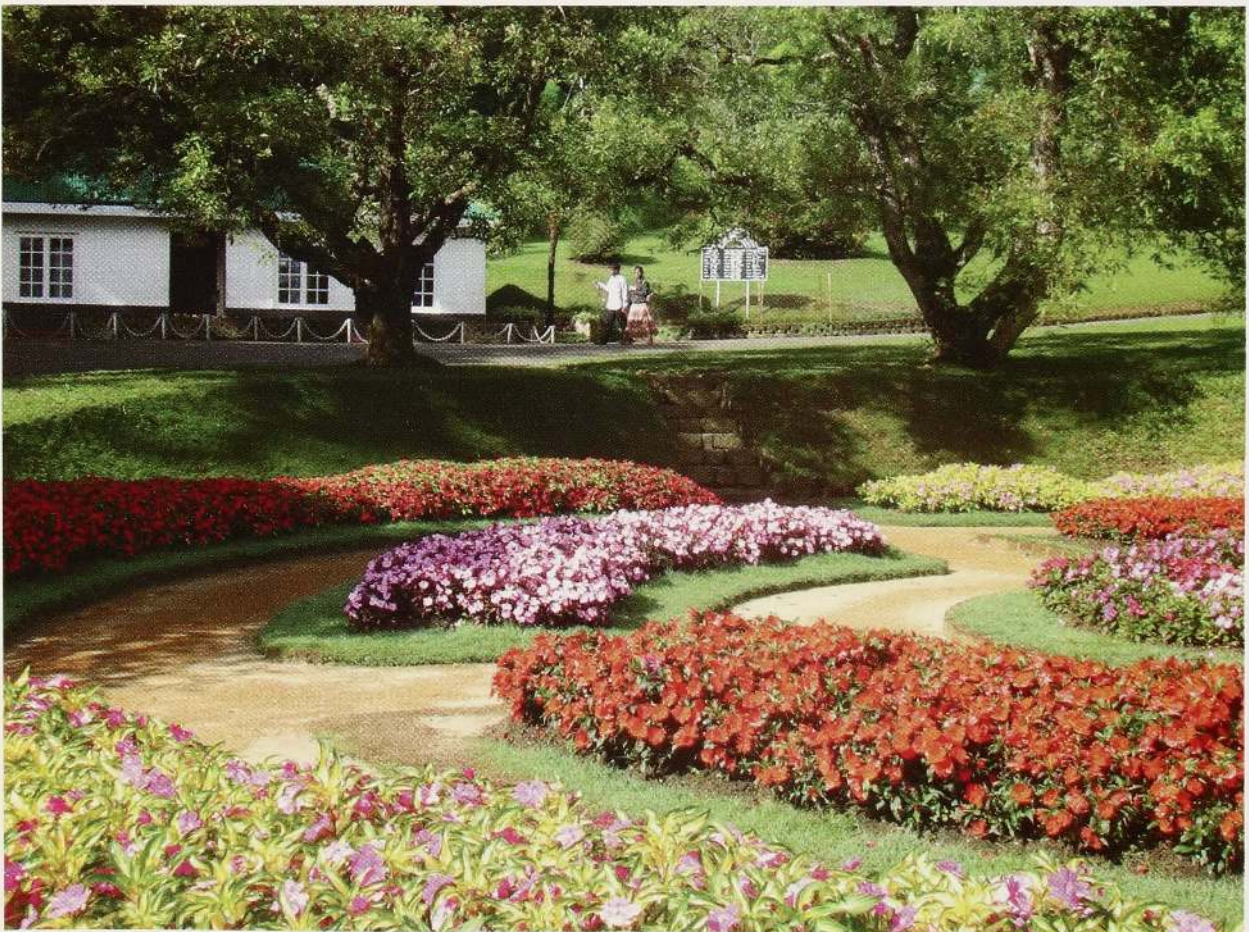
These gardens, 22 hectares or 55 acres in extent, were first established in 1861 as a centre for experimentation and for the distribution of cinchona plants; the source of quinine. The main reason for the selection of Hakgala for the trial cultivation of this plant appears to be the similarity between the topography of Hakgala and the region in Peru where cinchona was found growing in the wild state. The Cinchona industry collapsed by 1880.

In 1882 the ornamental layout of the Gardens began with the introduction of a large number of temperate and subtropical plants from throughout the world. By a curious coincidence, three British Curators with identical names administered the affairs of this institution during the Colonial period. They were William Nook, the pioneer Curator, followed by J.K. Neck and J.J. Nock respectively. The Gardens take the form of a number of terraces upon the lower slopes of the Hakgala Rock through which a number of springs cascade down in to the valley below. The Gardens command a panoramic view of the rolling downs of the Uva Valley with the nine-peaked Namunukula range of hills adorning the distant background.

During the months of October to December, thick mist begins to rise from the Uva Valley during the afternoons and gradually envelope the Gardens like a veil, while from the month of May to August, gusts of strong westerly winds blow across the Gardens towards the Uva Basin making weird sounds, particularly at night. The tall lop-sided trees to be found in the Gardens are a measure of the velocity and direction of the recurring winds. These natural phenomena coupled with the remoteness of the area, accentuated by the looming presence of Hakgala rock and the vast wilderness preserve behind; may give the visitor a feeling of uneasiness in spite of the fresh, even, alpine atmosphere. He may equally experience surprise or even a shock on meeting



Fernery, Hakgala Gardens



The Flower Garden & the Office, Hakgala Gardens



The Arboretum, Hakgala Gardens



Cajaput Tree (*Mayana* or *Acrocalymma*) Hakgala Gardens
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Hakgala Rock, Hakgala Gardens



bands of the large 'Wanduroo' or Black Monkey as they jump from branch to branch in the Gardens. They are a familiar part of the natural fauna of the region and are generally harmless.

Over the last 150 years the Gardens have matured to form a compact and delightful environment where trees, shrubs and herbs from far away California, China, England, the Himalayas and Australia mix freely with native plants; the most unusual of which is perhaps the woolly Tree Fern of Sri Lanka. In recent years the upper terraces constituting the Arboretum have been re-developed and a Drive encircling the upper boundary of the Gardens constructed. In addition a trail leading to the top of Hakgala rock through the montane forest has been re-established for the benefit of the botanist or the naturalist.

Upon entering the Gardens the visitor is struck by the large Monterey Cypresses (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) from California, some of which are over 100 years old. A large number of Conifers and other trees of temperate lands are found here. There are the Cedars from Japan and Bermuda valued for their timber; Cypresses from Mexico, Europe and California; pines from the Himalayas and China and Araucarias from Queensland and New Caledonia. Of the temperate broad-leaved trees a plantation of English Oak (*Quercus robur*); the New South Wales Turpentine tree (*Syncarpia glomulifera*); the Camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*) of China and Japan and the Rhodoleia *championi* of China with its bright red flowers are interesting. Notable indigenous trees are the 'Wana sapu' tree (*Michelia nilagirica*); the very rare 'Mihiriya' tree (*Gordonia ceylanica*) and the 'Maha Ratmal' tree (*Rhododendron arboreum* subsp *zeylanicum*); the only indigenous Rhododendron, which produces striking clusters of dark-crimson flowers from May to August.

In the herbaceous borders of the terraced Flower Garden are found shrubs and herbs introduced from the temperate zone. There are the Camellia of Japan; the Bottle Brush of Australia; several species of *Fuchsia* with drooping clusters of pretty flowers; the 'Madanakama' (*Michelia figo*) from China with strongly scented flowers; the Fire Bush (*Streptosolen jamesonii*) of Columbia with showy orange-yellow flowers and decorative plants such as the Cotton Lavender (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*) and *Strobilanthes gossypinus* of India with striking woolly leaves of silver hue.

The Rose Garden established on twin terraces adjoining the Flower garden is a favourite spot of the local visitor. Laid out on formal lines, it contains a representative collection of modern roses imported from England. Roses bear blooms best during the month of April, presenting a dazzle of colour.

The Fernery is one of the most characteristic sections of the Gardens. Shaded by tall trees, all of them native to Sri Lanka, the setting here is enchanting. The Woolly Tree Fern of Sri Lanka (*Alsophila crinita*), very majestic in appearance, gives a unique character and contrast to the surroundings. Under the shade of trees and gigantic green crowns of the tree ferns, thrives a wide selection of native hill-country ferns.

Adjoining the Fernery, the old Rock garden is laid out among natural rocks and boulders with much ingenuity, taking full advantage of a natural stream flowing close-by, the diverted waters of this stream feed ponds in which grow yellow water lilies, while winding paths lead the visitor to plots of flowering shrubs and herbs.

Below the exit drive the layout is natural and the growth is rank and subtropical. Amidst the diversity of trees and shrubs is found the Bulb Garden which is laid out in beds of regular pattern containing bulbous plants such as *Lilium*, *Zephyranthes*, *Watsonia*, *Amaryllis* & *Agapanthus*.

Above the Fernery and the Old Rock Garden, the sloping land shaded by lofty trees has been recently set out as a Japanese Garden with rippling streams of cascading water and rustic wooden bridges blending with the natural landscape.

On the upper slopes of the Gardens alongside the newly constructed Upper Drive, the Old Tea Plot exhibits the original plants of the Assam Hybrid introduced to Sri Lanka in 1870. Here also grow very old specimens of the Monterey cypress of California. Beyond the Upper Drive lies a vast preserve of the natural montane evergreen forest which is a refuge for many species of trees, shrubs, herbs, epiphytes, mosses and lichens. It is also a sanctuary for the 'Wanduroo' or Black monkey, the rock squirrel, the jungle-fowl and birds of many kinds. Larger animals like the Sambhur deer, wild boar and leopard are also seen here occasionally.

Despite the obvious rarity of palms in the Gardens, the Canary Island date palm, *Phoenix canariensis*, (opposite the Gardens' Office) is a gem with a crown of handsome feathery leaves. Another palm grown here is the common European Fan palm (*Chamaerops humilis*)

Along the Exit Drive, close to the nursery stand a glass house which contains a collection of geraniums, gloxinias and tuberous begonias, and a collection of highland orchids. A landmark in the Gardens is the striking summer house which forms a memorial to the Nockses. It is situated on a vantage point overlooking the distant scenery of the Uva Valley.

But for the Asian visitor at least, Hakgala may evoke associations quite other than those of botany; in one episode of the great Indian Epic, the Ramayana, Hakgala is linked with Sri Lanka's pre-history. According to this legend, Ravana, the mighty Demon-king of Sri Lanka abducted Sita, the beautiful consort of Rama, King of Ayodhya in India, by means of an air-ship, and held her captive somewhere here, in the wilderness of Hakgala !

Thus do legend and natural beauty intertwine at the node of the Botanic Gardens.

THE BOTANIC GARDENS HENARATHGODA (GAMPAHA)

The Botanic Gardens, Henarathgoda, are situated 32 km (20 miles) east of Colombo in the vicinity of the town of Gampaha. Access to the Gardens is through a minor road that branches off the Gampaha Minuwangoda road, 1.6 km (1 mile) from the town. The town of Gampaha can be reached by turning off the main Colombo - Kandy road either at the Miriswatta or the Yakkala junction. Despite the remoteness of their situation, the Gardens lie just 10 miles from Colombo International Airport, Katunayake.

The Gardens, 14.5 hectares (36 acres) in extent, are located among Sri Lanka's pastoral scenery of rice fields, coconut groves and homesteads in the low country wet zone. The origin of these Gardens in 1876 is connected with the story of rubber, for it was here that the original consignment of 1919 seedlings of Para rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*), sent through Kew Gardens and raised from seeds obtained by Sir Henry Wickham from Brazil, were planted and propagated. This original stock has sprung the plantations of the whole of the East. The No. 2 tree of this first plantation became world-famous, after yielding 217 kgs (392 lbs) of dry rubber in 4 years and 9 months. With the fulfilment of the early promise of rubber, this experimental station was developed into a botanic gardens.

The climate which is similar to that prevailing in Colombo is hot and humid, the temperature averaging 28.3°C (80 °F). The vegetation in the Gardens is tropical and consists of a varied collection of exotic palms, flowering trees and shrubs introduced from other tropical countries. The types of plants grown here are similar to those found in the Peradeniya Gardens, but the foliage of crotons, *Cordyline*, *Dracaena* and similar plants is more colourful, while tropical flowering shrubs such as *Bougainvillea*, *Hibiscus*, *Ixora* and *Mussaenda* present a greater profusion of colour when blooming, because of the high temperature and humidity.

At the entrance to the Gardens, an avenue of recently replanted Royal Palms (*Roystonea regia*) greets the visitor, while to the right and left lie two drives which encircle the Gardens. On the right hand side bordering the circular pond stands a replica of a tropical rain forest, a tangled mass of trees, shrubs and undergrowth draped with climbers. This is typical, of the climax type of vegetation that existed in the region prior to the development of plantation crops and rice cultivation. The Main Drive stretches on through the entire length of the Gardens. The Flower Garden planted with beds of flowering plants and colourful foliage lies on the right hand side of the Main Drive. The greenhouse nearby exhibits a collection of colourful foliage plants and ferns. Two of the outstanding ferns in the collection are the large Bird's-nest Fern (*Asplenium nidus*) and the pendulous Ribbon Fern (*Ophioglossum pendulum*), both indigenous to Sri Lanka. An area adjoining the Flower Garden has been turned into a Japanese Garden with a miniature water- fall cascading into a winding rill edged with groups of dwarf shrubs. In the Orchid House (constructed recently) are displayed a collection of ornamental orchid hybrids.



Flower Graden, Henerathgoda Gardens



The Pleasure Garden with a Lake, Henerathgoda Gardens
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The Gardens have a representative collection of flowering trees. Here are the tabebuias producing masses of pink or yellow flowers in March or April; various flowering cassias resplendent from March to September with their bright masses of yellow or pink flowers; the ferny leaved Jacaranda which several times a year puts forth violet-blue flowers that form a carpet of colour when the blossom fall; the Potato tree, one of the few trees of the potato family (*Solanum macranthum*), producing blue and white flowers throughout the year, and the striking Flamboyant tree bearing immense sprays of scarlet or orange flowers which brighten the landscape in April and May.

In addition to the large and conspicuous specimens of Mahogany, there is a wide range of trees yielding products of economic value. The Satinwood tree of Sri Lanka and India which yields a valuable hard wood with a satin-like lustre and the straight-stemmed 'Hora' tree (*Dipterocarpus zeylanicus*) are noteworthy. The latter is used for building construction and pit-props in plumbago mines (the source of graphite). Visitors also should not miss the oil -yielding plants represented by the "Chaulmoogra" (*Taraktogenus kurzii*) of Burma (used for leprosy); the 'Domba' tree (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) of Sri Lanka and the Margosa tree valuable in Ayurvedic medicine.

There are several species of palms in the Gardens of which is the Livistona Palm (*Livistona rotundifolia*), the Sealing Wax Palm (*Cyrtostachys renda*) with its bright red leaf sheaths, and the Climbing Palm (*Calamus rotang*), which provides the rattan of the furniture maker, are interesting to the visitor. There is also a female plant of the Coco-de-mer or Double Coconut Palm in the Gardens. It used to be pollinated by pollen brought from the male plants at Peradeniya.

The 'visitor may find the Heneratgoda Gardens less exciting than the Gardens at Peradeniya and Hakgala. The soil in most parts of the Heneratgoda Gardens is poor in its physical properties, chemical constituents and moisture retention. This is a constraint to sustained horticulture and further improvement would involve costly inputs. The Government is therefore maintaining the Gardens for their historical role in the Rubber industry and as a recreational amenity for local and Colombo residents.

It seems pertinent here to record that two other Botanic gardens, one at Badulla and the other at Anuradhapura, were established by the British during the same period, but been closed down. The Badulla Gardens are now maintained by the local authority as a Municipal park but part of the original layout and trees of the original planting are still visible.

The Department of National Botanic Gardens, under its new development strategy, has already commenced the establishment of new botanic gardens at Mirijjawila in the Hambantota District of the Southern Province. The proposed site is located in the arid zone of the island and here the climate is dry with a periodical rainfall. The authorities propose to grow drought-resistant plants in this garden.

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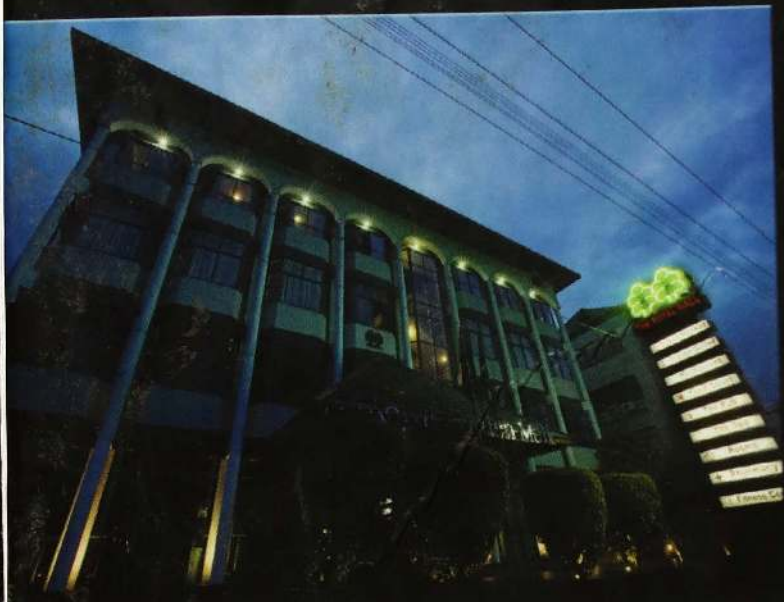
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2474

Index to Map

1. Spice Garden
2. Jak Tree
3. Plant House
4. Cactus House
5. Orchid House
6. Flower Garden
7. Durian Tree
8. Fernery
9. Calamander Tree
10. Fruit Plot
11. Palmyrah Palm Avenue
12. Java Almond Tree
13. Cannon-ball Tree
14. Cabbage Palm Avenue
15. Sausage Tree
16. Thwaite's Monument
17. Memorial Trees
18. Arboretum
19. Royal Palm Avenue
20. Calabash Tree
21. Mahogany Tree
22. Satinwood Tree
23. Baobab Tree
24. Suspension Bridge
25. Ebony Tree
26. Araucaria Avenue
27. National Herbarium
28. Java Willow Tree
29. Cafeteria
30. Rockery
31. Napoleon's Crown Tree
32. Lake
33. Giant Bamboo Clump
34. Talipot Palm
35. Medicinal Garden
36. Pinetum
37. Palmetum
38. Student's Garden
39. Cycad Collection
40. Bamboo Collection
41. Gardner's Monument
42. Double Coconut Palms
43. Giant Kauri Pines
44. Candle Tree
45. Amherstia Trees



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