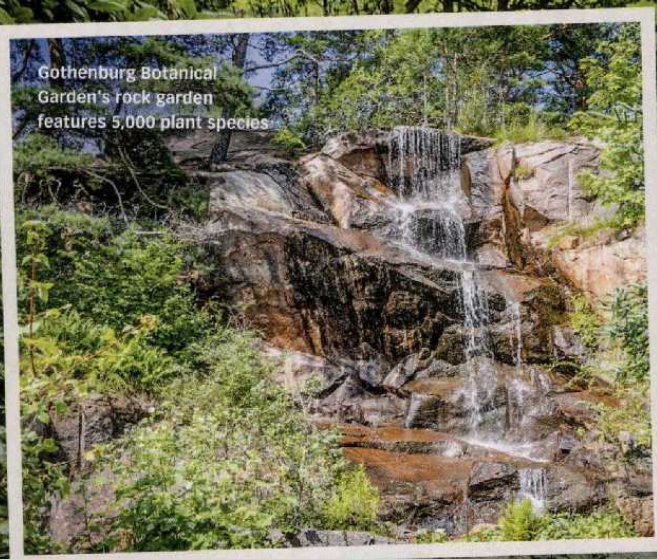




GARDEN GLOBETROTTING

Gothenburg Botanical Garden's rock garden features 5,000 plant species



The charm of West Sweden

In Gothenburg and beyond, Emma Crawford discovered gardens and gardeners with an emphasis on sustainability, tranquillity and – above all – living life well



Emma Crawford,
Horticultural Editor

By the time I reached Gothenburg Botanical Garden, now one of my all-time favourite gardens, I had experienced a whirlwind trip over one long June weekend, introducing me to the landscape and culture of West Sweden. For me, the best thing about the botanic garden was its vast collection of plants, including a rock garden featuring 5,000 species alone. A waterfall, stream and ponds ensure this naturalistic feature caters for alpinists from all situations and regions.

The Japanese Dell, arboretum, kitchen, herb and bulb gardens add thousands more

plants, and I was lucky enough to be visiting when an old favourite, stunning *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm', was flowering. This is significant: it was almost midsummer, but in south-west Sweden, temperatures were just pleasantly warm and rainfall common, so plants like the Himalayan blue poppy, which we struggle to grow in most of the UK, were thriving.

This large public garden is not just for plant addicts – a café provides a delicious lunch, it has great topography for healthy walks, and art and culture are promoted here – a huge tree sculpture called *Haven* by Stuart Ian Frost particularly caught my eye.

This visit was made special by my guide, another botanic garden fanatic, Camilla Danielsson, who opens her home garden,

Känn Trädgården, to visitors by special arrangement. It's well worth contacting her to see how she has moulded a forbidding slope, with protruding rocks, into a domestic paradise. Right plant, right place rules for Camilla and has enabled her to fit ferns, hostas, rhododendrons and the Katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum*) next to steps down the shady side and bright perennials such as geums, alliums and geraniums up the sunny side. There are cosy nooks with tables and chairs and modest terraces where Camilla entertains groups of garden lovers. Her plot was beautiful when I was there in June, but this is a sensory garden for all seasons, with snowdrop walks for winter visitors.

My Swedish journey was bookended with



The Japanese Dell in the Gothenburg Botanical Garden is the result of a seed exchange that began more than 100 years ago

gardens, starting at Jonsereds Trädgårdar, where the 19th-century manor house features a formal garden of roses and neat hedging which also welcomes wildlife via bird boxes and pollinator pitstops. From a table on the café terrace you can marvel at the beautifully trained climbers and perfectly maintained paths edged with nepeta and hakonechloa and punctuated by *Cornus kousa* and *Pyrus salicifolia*.

From here a wonderful surprise awaited me at Nollhaga Park, Alingsås. Once a grand, private estate, it was taken over by the municipal government in 1921 and the city gardeners now manage the land for the benefit of citizens and the environment. I was delighted by an experimental and

naturalistic area created by gardener, Jesper Lindblad, stuffed full of flowers from prairies, steppes, alpine regions, brownfield sites and meadows. The aim is to create self-sustaining plant communities, and the result was both beautifully colourful and covered with butterflies, which are monitored and recorded. This planting was influenced by the English designer, Nigel Dunnett, and reminded me of some of his designs, but Jesper knew every angelica, salvia, poppy, phlomis and pulsatilla and his plans for the future of this site were exciting to hear.

Day one ended at the hotel Dahlbogården Event and Rum. My evening was restful, with a walk around the large swimming

lake and the relaxed gardens, and a delicious home-cooked meal. These facilities are part of a family-run farm and my hostess was generous with her time while juggling her other responsibilities.

The following morning, I was in the grand quarry at Kinnekulle, just over an hour's drive away. Beneath deciduous woodland lies a huge carpet of wild garlic which looks spectacular when the white flowers are blooming. I'd just missed that moment, but the birdsong was breathtaking and part of a wonderfully calming ambience. I would love to visit again and spend more time there.

A five-minute drive took me to the impressive estate of Hellekis Säteri, a manor house with a garden featuring a gorgeous

global gardens



The design at Jonsereds Trädgård echoes the formal layout of the 19th-century manor garden



Handens Hus is open seasonally, from April to September each year

mixed border of roses, oriental poppies, peonies and irises. Flanked by hornbeam hedges and large copper beeches, it was perfectly maintained and a fitting tribute to Carl Linnaeus, who visited the manor in 1746, noting its walnut trees. I loved my lunch in the vine-shaded orangery, where the chef served dishes of locally sourced ingredients, including the wild garlic.

That afternoon, the most exciting moment of my trip happened when my hosts at Handens Hus (old stone house) told me that I could find swathes of lady's slipper orchid, *Cypripedium calceolus*, growing wild in the woods 10 minutes away. Lena and Janne Rundqvist live onsite, running a café, weaving studio and antiques shop. Many of the places I visited are part of 'Stepping up Sustainability', whereby the Swedish tourist industry takes responsibility for limiting environmental impacts. Lena and Janne kindly showed me around their home



The owner of Känn Trädgård has transformed a tricky rocky site into a beautiful plant-filled oasis

PHOTOS: EMMA CRAWFORTH; MONIKA MANOWSKA; JONSEREDS TRÄDGÅRD

The Little Castle Garden is an integral part of Läckö Castle, with organic growing at its heart



garden as well as their commercial ventures and explained how the tradition of painting houses red in Sweden had arisen, using locally abundant pigments.

Afterwards I detoured to the orchids and found hundreds at the very end of flowering. Famously in the UK, this orchid was once thought extinct, with the locations of any wild ones a closely guarded secret, so following my hosts' instructions to their location in the woods was a botanical dream.

At Läckö Castle I particularly enjoyed looking around the veg garden, with rows of beautiful vegetables in elegant curves. This is masterminded by garden designer Simon Irvine and a very pleasing sight, with the practical consequence of organic supplies for its restaurant.

The next day was Saturday, and what better way to spend the morning than by visiting a combined knitting shop and café, Hemma på Källebacka, where the proprietor says her vision is to provide a place for visitors to find peace and relax, with no pressure to buy anything. I loved meeting Marja and looking around her café garden with tabletop arrangements of pansies and pelargoniums in upcycled pots. Her lunch was delicious too!

While navigating my June tour, I couldn't help wondering about winter. What happens when the idyllic wildflowers are replaced with snow? My next visitor had a solution for cold-weather gardening. At Björnhyltans Trädgård, farmer Peder Wendefors has built a great big *livsrum* greenhouse. These Swedish structures are half living area, half garden and Peder grows crops and ornamentals in his – think hydrangeas, fuchsias and cordylines – as well as hosting village meetings and

Peder's greenhouse is a winter refuge for plants and people alike



family gatherings. His cake-making prowess was almost as impressive as his gardening.

My final night was spent in the cosy Lilla Hotellet Tranemo, owned by local artist, Lena Björn. In a complex of small buildings, once artisan workshops, her tasteful renovation has resulted in a family home, studio and hostelry linked by a delightful Swedish-style cottage garden. Every container, tripod, path and border has been carefully designed to fulfil a purpose and make the most of the space. Over *fika* we discussed gardening, politics, philosophy and art.

Fika is a coffee break but it's also a moment to connect with others and recharge. It's a beloved Swedish ritual and a good subject to end on, because what made my Swedish trip special was not only the gardens but also the gardeners and plant lovers I met along the way. □