

# Manito's majesty

I finally beheld Spokane's breathtaking series of gardens and now plan to make it a regular visit



**Tribune/Jeanne M. DePaul**

The formal sunken garden at Spokane's Manito Park reaches its full glory in late summer. This photo was taken in September and shows full beds of colorful annuals.

**Sandra Lee/Lewiston Tribune**

SPOKANE - Tell me why, please, a person - me - will deliberately drive several hundred miles to visit public gardens and neglect to see something as beautiful as Spokane's Manito Park.

I'm betting a lot of people, like me, just don't realize what's there.

Even when I received a copy of "The Pacific Northwest Garden Tour" book by Donald Olson a couple of years ago, I read almost exclusively about places a day's drive or more away. I read about gardens where I had a vacation planned, or a hoped-for trip, totally missing the few pages near the back about Manito, an easy day trip away.

Then I was invited to join the Garden Club for all Seasons and its veteran members decided a trip was in order. A bus was hired and an itinerary set that wasn't based on how fast we could get from Point A (Lewiston) to Point B (Spokane).

For the first time in a lifetime of living in north central Idaho, I got to see some of the small towns I'd seen mostly as names in community celebrations and obituaries: Rockford, Latah, Tekoa, Freeman.

Club president and tour leader Juergen Schratzenholzer pointed out Mica Peak, nowhere near where I thought it was, and Mount Spokane, and gave a running commentary on the history of the region.

We could have cut an hour off the trip, but oh, what we would have missed. What we might have done better was to stop in some of those towns, visit a museum or two, ask the history of the odd old brick building on one main street, drink a few cups of coffee with the locals.

But the goal this day was Manito, a 112-year-old park on Spokane's South Hill. Its 90 acres are set among craftsman-style houses, many built early in the last century and worth a drive-by themselves.

It was known originally as Montrose, or Mountain of Roses, but changed to Manito.

Manito is a series of five parks, two playgrounds, a glass-house conservatory, a large pond, stone stairways, bridges, bike trails and an outdoor cafe, all clustered on gently rolling hills.

Everyone has a favorite, and it likely changes by the season, but if the word breathtaking is to be applied, expect it when you reach a slight rise and look down into the Duncan Garden. Its 3 acres of formal flower beds are mirror images along each side of a central aisle, seeming more like something from an historic estate than a public park.

The sunken garden was the result of 42,500 wagon loads of soil being removed to improve the rest of the park, according to the city of Spokane's "Walking Guide to Manito Park." It was initially designed in 1912 and redesigned 20 years ago.

Adjacent to the sunken garden is the Gaiser Conservatory, a modestly sized greenhouse with a small waterfall and a variety of exotics native to many parts of the Earth. It's warm, moderately humid and it smells good.

We were a couple of months too late for the famed Lilac Garden blooms but right on time for Rose Hill's 1,500 new, old and antique roses. We strolled, sniffed and snapped photos. Amid a couple of hundred varieties ranging from miniatures to climbers, I surprised myself by identifying a favorite, Cinco de Mayo, a rusty-pinkish-orange floribunda with a strong fragrance so often bred out of modern roses.

That rose points out one of my favorite things about Manito Park: A good share of what grows there is labeled. If you seriously want something for your own, which is likely after walking through the Joel Ferris Perennial Garden, a lot of the guesswork is gone.

A favorite of my editor is the Nishinomiya-Tsutakawa Japanese Garden that grew out of a Sister City program with a Japanese city of the same name. Spokane's garden was designed by Nagao Sakurai, former chief landscape architect for the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. It was dedicated as part of Expo '74. In turn, a lilac garden was planted in the city of Nishinomiya.

That serene and fenced garden is highlighted by waterfalls, a large pond (complete with koi) and a walking path.

Amid the beauty also is sadness. In the park's early years, a zoo took up almost a third of the park. In 1932 when Spokane, like the rest of the nation, was hit hard by the Great Depression, the feed bill for the animals was \$3,000 a year and the parks board ordered the superintendent to dismantle the zoo.

But the park survived and thousands visit there every year. Having finally learned of the place, I plan to be one of them again in the spring when the lilac garden is in full bloom.

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*Lee is an avid gardener and a retired Lewiston Tribune reporter. If you know of or have a special garden or yard, you can let her know at [sandra.lee208@gmail.com](mailto:sandra.lee208@gmail.com) or call Close to Home Editor Jeanne DePaul at (208) 848-2221.*