

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for October

Benvenuto to Butchart Gardens



Photo Cynthia Brian

The Sunken Garden Lake echoed the lily pond of Monet's Garden in Giverny, France.

By Cynthia Brian

"I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers." – L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*
O Canada!

After a hot summer of weeding, pruning, mowing, cleaning, composting and tidying my plots, traveling to Victoria in British Columbia was a welcome respite. Despite the cold and inclement weather on Vancouver Island, we set out to explore the extraordinary National Historic Site of Canada in Brentwood Bay known as The Butchart Gardens.

In 1904, the Butchart family built their home amongst sheltered Tod Inlet surrounded by forests and fields in an area where there were limestone deposits, the perfect conditions for establishing a cement plant. They named the location "Benvenuto," meaning "welcome" in Italian. Mr. Butchart's first barge load of cement sailed from the inlet in 1905 for sale to Canadian cities. As rocks were gathered and piled in select locations and soil was brought in by the wagonloads, the quarry soon metamorphosed into the show-stopping sunken gardens. Every site for planting was meticulously chosen and a lake was created from the deepest part of the quarry, fed by a waterfall and stream.

Still owned and maintained by the Butchart family, the 55 acres of gardens continue to evolve, expand and attract. Over a million visitors a year flock to this oasis of calm and beauty. Today separate gardens include the Rose, Italian, Mediterranean, Japanese and Sunken Garden. Numerous waterscapes abound. There are boat tours at Butchart Cove, fireworks in the evening, restaurants, tea time, and even a Carousel with 30 hand-carved animals that delight children and kids-at-heart alike.

Although I was enamored by the entire landscape, it was the Sunken Garden that captured my imagination. As an avid and very diligent gardener, I can only imagine the amount of labor that was involved in creating a lush and elegant horticultural masterpiece from a rough, grim, grey quarry of jagged rocks. As I meandered around the paths admiring the handiwork of years of devotion from hundreds of talented plant smiths, I was thrilled to see that the gorgeous flowers blooming in the beds and cascading over the stone banks, were plants that I grow in my California garden. Dahlias, roses, begonias, New Guinea impatiens, cannas, camellias, salvias, rhododendrons, geraniums, petunias, hydrangeas, alliums, acanthus, astilbes, arums, snapdragons, zinnias, euphorbias, fuchsias, heliotropes, hostas, lantanas, marigolds, and even an entire swatch of deep green shamrocks, also known as oxalis, blanketed this serene environment.

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The entrance to Butchart Gardens boasts 100 Years of Blooms, actually 115!