

BUTCHART GARDENS

More than 1 million visitors a year

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

VANCOUVER ISLAND, B.C. — Visit Butchart Gardens and see for yourself: its festoons of blooming annuals, reality-defying topiary, flowering trees and shrubs create the impression that you have arrived in a land of wealth and beauty.

That impression is not far from the truth. The gardens — there are seven thematic sections — were built in a former limestone quarry that the owners, the Butchart family, transformed into a garden estate available to the public.

For nearly 120 years, the Butchart family has maintained 55 acres of colorful and clever displays that look as if they sprang effortlessly from the soil. The gardens' magical quality attracts more than 1 million visitors each year.

Beyond magic, the gardens are a demonstration of skillful landscaping, planning and nursery work. The work changes each year, depending on what nature decides to do, according to



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

The Sunken Gardens at Butchart Gardens near Victoria, B.C.

Brian Nixon, horticultural manager. As a result, the gardens are renewed each season.

Depending on the season, from 300 to 600 staffers — including 50 to 70 gardeners — work to maintain the gardens, making the gardens one of the largest employers on Vancouver Island.

Although some trees and shrubs have been in the garden for decades, annuals and perennials are replanted each year.

Preparations take place in the 26 greenhouses cov-

ering 2 acres beyond the public gardens — the entire working gardens are on 135 acres. There the 900 varieties of annuals are either grown from seed or vegetative cuttings and potted in the greenhouse until ready for planting in the gardens the next spring. Tens of thousands of bulbs that had been dug up by hand are examined, and some replanted, but most are replaced each year.

Each bed is rototilled before it is replanted, a process that takes three weeks,



Butchart Gardens

One of hundreds of staffers tends to a small corner of Butchart Gardens.

while continuing to maintain the grounds.

Pruning the gardens' 2,500 roses is a two-week process.

The previous year's plant material is not wasted, Nixon said. It is mulched, composted and returned to the soil.

“This is an enormous undertaking requiring plenty of planning and strenuous hands-on labor,” said Nixon.

Butchart Gardens aims to delight and inspire its visitors. As a result, much of the planning focuses on aesthetics. “Some of the things that we are looking to perfect are color combinations, flower timing, textures and flower height.”

The gardens' century of work has not been lost on the professional world. As a member of several international flower societies, Butchart consistently wins awards for its innovative nursery work designs.

For more information about Butchart Gardens, visit its website, <https://www.butchartgardens.com>.

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