

# Hike

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and there are special rates for groups, schools and camps. Once you pay admission, you'll be given a sticker to display on your clothing during your visit.

Also in the Visitor Center is a well-stocked gift store and the Kitchen Garden Cafe, open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily.

The gardens were constructed to be easily accessible. The Visitor Center and Central Gardens are ADA-compliant and there are benches placed throughout the grounds for visitors to rest. In addition, the gardens provide wheelchairs on loan at no charge on a first-come, first-served basis; scooters are available to rent for \$16 on a first-come, first-served basis for use in the Central Gardens.

Outside the Central Gardens, the paths become more difficult as the terrain involves more hills and trails enter the forest. These woodland trails stretch for several miles, visiting a waterfall and tracing the shore of Huckleberry Cove and Back River, where a boat landing is located with kayaks for rent.

Along the trails and throughout the gardens are educational displays on topics pertaining to the gardens as well as the natural landscape. There are also permanent and temporary sculptures scattered throughout the gardens by a variety of artists, and rotating art exhibits in the Visitor Center, Kitchen Garden Cafe and Education Center.

The gardens provide several special tours and services, all of which can be learned about at the Visitor Center. For example, the gardens offer kayak tours led by a registered guide; tours on the Beagle, the first fully electric Coast Guard-certified vessel in Maine; and one-hour tours of the gardens by quiet electric carts, led by trained docents. Call at least one week before your visit to make reservations.

In the gardens, visitors are asked to walk only on the paths or lawns and to leave

plants and wildlife undisturbed. Children must be supervised at all times. Climbing on garden sculptures, active sports (such as kite flying and bicycling), barbecuing and smoking are not permitted. Also, keep in mind that the gates are locked at closing. Leave before then.

Dogs are not permitted in the gardens (unless they are service animals), but they are permitted in the parking areas and on the adjacent dog trail if on a leash at all times. There is a water spigot and water dish for pets in the picnic area beside the southernmost parking pod. Visitors are expected to pick up after their dogs; the gardens provide plastic bags for picking up dog waste, as well as trash bags where you can dispose of the waste.

For information, call 633-8000 or visit [mainegardens.org](http://mainegardens.org).

**Personal note:** The Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens is a special place to me and my husband, Derek, because it's the location of one of our first dates back in 2009. At the time, the gardens had only been open for two years, and they were still expanding. Yet it was still one of the most fantastical places I'd ever been, with a greater variety of plants than I'd ever seen, metal animal sculptures lurking on perfectly manicured lawns and children building fairy houses in the woods.

The next year, in August 2010, I returned to the gardens to write a story about the Maine Fairy House Festival, which was so popular that it is now a weekly event

in July and August called "Fairy Fridays," with a full schedule of fairy activities, including puppet shows, stories and crafts, fairy yoga, and music and dancing with the Great Bubble Machine. Picture hundreds of children wearing sparkly wings, dancing amidst flower beds and through the woods. It's quite a magical event.

My third (and Derek's second) visit to the gardens came on Sunday, Aug. 14, of this year. It was a sunny, hot day, and we were both tired after an eventful weekend in Portland for my 10th-year high school reunion. Yet I managed to convince Derek that we'd be remiss to not stop by the gardens on the way home for a stroll through the flowers.

Walking from the parking lot to the Visitor Center to pay admission, I kept pausing to photograph different flowers, saying things like, "I've never seen this type before!" and "Oh, look at the color of that one!" Looking back on the whole visit, I feel slightly guilty. While I was in photographer's heaven, Derek was probably not having quite as much fun on such a hot, sunny day. I kept looking up from my camera to see him waiting patiently in the nearest patch of shade.

The absolute best part of our visit, for me, was spotting a monarch butterfly and getting the opportunity to photograph it as it drew nectar from a bundle of purple flowers. Monarchs used to be very common in Maine, but in recent years, their numbers have plummeted due to several factors, in-



AISLINN SARNACKI | BDN

Across the man-made Blueberry Pond, visitors explore the Bibby and Harold Alford Children's Garden at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay.

cluding the destruction of their winter habitat in Mexico and the depletion of milkweed, their primary food source, throughout North America. So to see one of these large, stunning butterflies — with its bright orange wings veined in black, and its black body dotted with white — was such a treat.

Derek and I wandered the gardens for a few hours, taking the time to duck into the

forest on the Brook Trail, which we followed to Huckleberry Cove. On a bench by the cove, we enjoyed the breeze coming off the water, then hiked along the shore and uphill to the meditation garden, where I couldn't help but dip my hands in water held by a giant, stone bowl sculpture made by sculptor David Holmes.

Before leaving the gardens, I stopped into the gift store and was pleasantly

surprised to see so many interesting nature- and garden-themed items. Exercising restraint, I selected one thing to buy: a Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens T-shirt with a luna moth on the chest.

For more of Aislinn Sarnacki's adventures, visit her blog at [actoutwithaislinn.bangordailynews.com](http://actoutwithaislinn.bangordailynews.com). Follow her on Twitter: @1minhikegirl.



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