

Haskell Public Gardens: inspired community resource where art, respite and the green thumb meet

In a day and age when people are spending increasingly more time on their devices, we need resources that remind us that there are other ways to be engaged and entertained. We can expand our horizons beyond accessing information in the form of documents and images on a screen.

There is no substitute for hands on engagement in the “real” world, but for many of us that live within the city that typically comes in the form of eating out, heading out for drinks, perhaps an occasional visit to the zoo or theater.

While there is absolutely nothing wrong with those things, what they all lack is *nature*. Remember her? When I say nature, I don’t mean taking the dog for a walk through the park waiting for it to evacuate its bowels. Nor do I mean, sitting at the beach tanning. I mean, to enjoy the astounding variety of flowers, plants, trees, flora and fauna that we simply rarely see because we live in the city.



It's an element that should be present in everyone's lives. To be surrounded by nature, to engage it through exploration, to learn through observation is to recharge the body, mind and soul. Indeed, it has been the topic of countless poets, writers, and artists and a powerful source of inspiration.

Yet, it can still be social. It is inclusive, not exclusive. You can bring along a friend or family. You can even bring along your favorite device to take pictures of the glorious, natural beauty.

Do we have to drive to central or western Massachusetts for this? Another state further north? Not at all. There's a place right here in the city of New Bedford that offers this and much more: the Allen C. Haskell Public Gardens. Named after city resident and famed horticulturalist, Allen C. Haskell, who purchased the land and turned it into a nursery, the gardens began to deteriorate due to neglect after his passing away over a decade ago.

The 6 acre gardens were rescued in 2012 by The Trustees of

Reservations at the request of the city, is a hidden gem for residents – one that is simply not well-known in spite of its value and being completely free. While there are “only” 6 acres on site at Haskell Gardens, the “Trustees” preserve more than 26,000 acres across the state as an organization with 117 properties – Haskell Gardens is one of 12 public garden properties they are restoring.

The community resource goes far beyond its natural setting and offers a variety of unique programs and services. On the grounds you’ll find greenhouses, sheds, landscaped grounds, open space, historic structures (including one of the city’s oldest) and even buildings for public use. Want to have a wedding there? You can. Interested in the outdoors, gardening and art, and want to exercise that green thumb? You can do that too. Perhaps you just want to visit to stroll, smell the proverbial roses, or even help with the restoration... you are more than welcome!



Organizers like General Manager, Ross Moran, Visitor Services

and Shop Coordinator, Brooke Baptiste and Horticulture Assistant, Gene Bertrand have a genuine love for history, preservation and connecting people to Massachusetts's storied past. Their desire is to be an integral part of daily life for the community and would like nothing more than to see smiling faces get involved in a manner that suits them.

To get people away from the hustle and bustle of life, involved in horticulture, preservation, and education as well as participating in the many programs, events, and services is to enrich, empower and improve the entire community. They see the property as the foundation to develop that relationship.

Since the property is relatively new, and barely 4 years of age, it is still undergoing much renovation and improvement. There are a lot of plans in motion, and the public's suggestions and input on the direction are desired. Want to get your hands "dirty," so to speak? You can volunteer to help here.

"We'd love nothing more than to see farmer's markets, weddings, concerts, art exhibits, cultural festivals, private celebrations and more on the property on a regular basis. We have more than enough for those who have an interest in horticultural and agricultural initiatives – which falls under the purvey of our **Garden Restoration and Maintenance Initiative.**" explained General Manager, Ross Moran. "We also have a **Growing Program** focused on increasing appreciation, education and involvement in local or urban food production. Also, our new garden shop which will open again in the Spring and will feature some of the unique and rare plant material Allen used to sell. And, we will use the space as a revolving interpretive space for kids and families to learn more about horticulture and gardening on site."

One particular aspect that all are proud of and is of particular import – since it is ideal to get kids involved with nature at an early age – is the large park-like common

which often has lawn games available just for kids, and a hidden bamboo grove, which always gets the little ones excited. They can reconnect with nature by growing and nurturing their own plants, do plenty of climbing, crawling and exploring. Great exercise for their body and mind, and you'll also not have much trouble getting them into bed at night!



By getting involved and supporting the gardens you reward your body, mind and soul, but it also means you help insure that urban sprawl doesn't consume a green space. You play an active role in something that greatly benefits us all. Take advantage of a free resource!

One of the best ways to get more information is to meet the people involved. Of course, a visit to the ground is most ideal, but at two AHA! Nights – November 11 and December 17th – you can do just that by visiting the Haskell Public Gardens folks at their Holiday pop-up shop. You can ask a million questions, take home some literature, check out some of the artwork, sculpture, stained glass, pottery, etc. from local artisans that they place on the grounds, and perhaps get some

sage gardening advice. You'll be there anyway!

As a way to support local, small, and "green" oriented businesses, Haskell Gardens features these creations as well as wreaths, plants, flowers, gardening tools, on the property's "Happy Hosta" gift shop open Wednesday-Friday 11:00am-6:00pm and Saturdays 10:00am-3:00pm.

So, take a break from your busy life and stop and smell the "roses." Your soul will thank you!

Allen C. Haskell Public Gardens

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Parking is available on Shawmut Ave. and in the small parking lot on Loftus Street

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