

Monk Botanical Gardens



MASTER PLAN 2020

OUR VISION:

The Monk Botanical Gardens connects people to plants for a sustainable future.

OUR MISSION:

The Monk Botanical Gardens is seeking to become a premier botanical garden, providing opportunities to experience plants and understand their significance.

OUR VALUES:

Stewardship - We promote environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and the protection of our natural resources. We commit ourselves to understand how our actions create change in the world.

Awareness - We offer experiences to the public that inspire increased appreciation and understanding of plant communities and the relationship between these plant communities and people.

Inclusiveness - We provide a welcoming educational garden for a diverse population of people.

Respect - We have a culture of cooperation and support among staff and volunteers working together to carry out the organization's mission.

Excellence - We excel at innovation, creativity, collaboration, reliability, and accountability.

Aesthetics - We provide a variety of beautiful gardens and plants that engage visitors because of their unique landscaping, design and plant selection.

DESCRIPTION:

Located on 30 acres at 1800 N. First Ave. on Wausau's west side, the Gardens have become an urban sanctuary for education, appreciation of our environment, relaxation, and recreation.

The original 21 acres were generously donated to the community and the university for the purpose of creating a botanical garden by the Robert W. Monk family in 2003.

The Gardens are governed by a board of directors. The staff includes the executive director, education & events coordinator, and a horticulture and grounds manager.

Vision. Energy. Realization.

These are the attributes that have created one of the most inspirational and available educational resources in north-central Wisconsin: The Monk Botanical Gardens. Occupying 30 acres along North Fourth and First Avenues on Wausau's west side, the gardens are devoted to educating and connecting people with the natural world.

Today, children come to the Gardens to explore and experience the out-of-doors first-hand. Students come to learn about plants, soil, water, and wildlife--beyond the pictures and pages of their textbooks. Citizens, young and old, from near and far, come to contemplate, enjoy, and find peace of mind in this urban sanctuary.

Couples marry here; families reunite here; youngsters celebrate their birthdays here. All have enjoyed the quiet Memory Plaza, the Asian-inspired Meditation garden, the Treehouse, the Kitchen Garden and its unique Potager pavilion, the hosta-filled Shade Garden, the lighted trails, the pond, the Butterfly Garden, the Swallow Chimney, the educational signage, and Sara's Garden with special treats for youngsters.

You may be one of the many who come here in the early morning or late afternoon to walk the trails. You may snowshoe the trails in winter, or explore in early spring when trees are budding and flowers are poking their heads up for a look around. You may walk your dog here, or push a baby carriage while chatting with a friend.

The number of participants, the volunteer hours, the generous donations, the social media compliments--all increase every year.

But now, it is time to look ahead, and plan the next 10 to 20 years of the Monk Botanical Gardens. We hope the following outlines the new plans for the Gardens and gives you a clear and exciting picture of what the Gardens will look like and offer in the future. Read on and dream with us. It's Vision, Energy, Realization, Chapter 2.

A grand entrance.

It's a sunny morning in October. You drive out to the Monk Botanical Gardens for a cup of coffee and a view of the autumn color, which is just peaking. Orange. Yellow. Red. Against deep green pines.

Traveling east on Campus Drive, you turn left at Fourth Ave., heading toward the new entrance to the Gardens. An attractive sign announces the spacious parking area. With 173 spaces, including spots for up to 10 school buses, there's plenty of room for you. You park and walk toward the new LEED-certified Visitor Center Complex, passing by the small entry garden, full of seasonal plantings and ever-changing landscape design features.

Inside the spacious, naturally lit lobby, you're greeted by a friendly volunteer, who swipes your membership card. Another volunteer is just opening the gift shop, offering postcards and artwork featuring the Gardens and other natural scenes, books, locally crafted jewelry, Wausau mementos, clothing, and other items—all reflective of the natural world.

Just beyond are public restrooms, administrative offices, and the coffee shop where you plan to meet and start the day with good friends and tasty java. Large windows give your group a good look around.

To the north is the Education Wing, connected to the Visitor Center by an all-weather walkway. Two instructors are preparing the classroom for a visit from a local elementary school. The building contains large dividable spaces, and a state-of-the-art audiovisual system for slide shows and video presentations. The space is capable of handling several groups at a time. A popular feature is evening lectures on nature, the environment, and climate change.

On the roof above you, solar panels are already receiving some of the sunshine of the new day, generating electricity to help the Gardens reduce its dependence on fossil fuels.

A place to play and learn.

Educational activities for children have been a central theme of the Monk Botanical Gardens since day one. Programs have included summer camps, school field trips, birthday parties, weekend family fun days, and our popular "Tots in the Gardens" series.

Some of our favorite anecdotes include three-year-olds discovering frogs, kids finding the prizes in nature scavenger hunts, children listening to stories in our iconic Treehouse. So when your grandchildren visit for the weekend, you know that the Children's Garden is the perfect place to spend the afternoon.

Located just north of our Education Wing, the Children's Garden contains a variety of features designed to connect children with their natural world. At the north end, a small train station, modeled after Wausau's famous advertising logo, serves as a remote classroom. A round barn serves as another. These structures are not only fun places to explore, but they also provide a unique, close-to-nature learning environment.

Next to the train station are several small garden plots where children have planted fruits, vegetables, and flowers and tend them during the growing season. At a young age, they experience the satisfaction of gardening.

Near the barn is a farm windmill. This old technology, common on farms around north-central Wisconsin, teaches the basics of wind energy. It's juxtaposed with new technology—vibration wind turbines that add to the children's understanding of the dynamics of the environment.

Some of the Children's Garden is simply fun. There is a chessboard lawn. A hedge maze and a hedge pyramid, a story ring, and a pond encircled by a wetlands boardwalk. With a bit of luck, the kids might well see a frog or catch a tadpole.

The Orangery and special venues.

The best botanical gardens match the needs and desires of the residents of the area. The Monk Botanical Gardens does that and more with an Orangery, which displays plantings in the wintertime, an Event Lawn designed to accommodate weddings and other group functions, the Amphitheater, and the Enabling Garden for visitors with special needs.

The Orangery connects with the Visitor Center and extends south toward a patio and spectacular fountain. You can see it from your table in the coffee shop.

It's a large greenhouse of sorts, totaling 5,500 square feet. Completely enclosed and climate-controlled, it's an ideal place to visit in winter and browse among warm-weather plants, trees, flowers, and shrubs not indigenous to our area.

In warmer weather, you may come out for a Shakespearean play in the new amphitheater, hollowed out in the center of the Gardens. It's just east of the Orangery and Visitor Center and is surrounded by nature. The stage and seating areas are unique and perfect for outdoor presentations.

Next to the Amphitheater, the new Event Lawn invites a stroll among the artistic sundial, paver walkways, and lawn plantings. A spacious, manicured area, it is perfect for large gatherings, with easy access to the visitor's center in case of rain.

In the creative Enabling Garden, visitors with special needs experience flowers and plantings in the Fragrance Garden, hear and feel nature in the Sound and Texture Garden, and plant and tend their own gardens on raised beds. It is a place where nature heals and inspires, just for them.

Oompah-Pah and more.

Your afternoon mail brings an invitation to a special event at the Monk Botanical Gardens at the end of the month. It's a beer and music evening at the new Beer Garden and Café, located on the south end of the Gardens. Sounds like fun.

The Beer Garden is a commercial establishment, operated by a local brewpub and restaurant, under contract with the Gardens. A portion of the proceeds goes to fund the Gardens.

A special parking lot supports the Beer Garden, accessible off Campus Drive, and the Café features locally sourced farm-to-table food and dairy products, including a special brand of ice cream that is drawing raves around town. The brew is local, too. And there's music. The whole scene may take you back to the beer gardens, lederhosen, and oompah-pah bands of Old Germany.

On another day, you take your family to the new rental camping area in the northeast corner of the Gardens. It's a secluded spot, featuring small yurts, where you can bed down for the night and listen to the owls and crickets. The small rental office provides a kitchen, restrooms, and showers.

Trails are the fibers of the Monk Botanical gardens, connecting you to secluded places, new discoveries, amazing scenes, and open spaces. Along the way, benches and shelters provide places to rest or get out of the rain.

The Wooded Wetlands Trail in the northern section of the Gardens winds through white pines and hardwoods and leads to the Fungi Garden, full of mushrooms. And to the Rock and Dwarf Conifer Garden which features a recirculating stream, dwarf conifers, and a unique geological collection of Marathon County pre-Cambrian rock and stone dating back 1.8 billion years. The sawmill from the old Stone Lumber Company has been reconstructed and awaits your exploration.

It's a mini-state park inside the city limits.

Final reflections.

The trails along the north edge of the Gardens take you back to the Visitor Center. It's been a pleasant morning, which you've shared with too many species of birds to count, and others who have come out for a stroll.

At the Visitor Center, you stop at the gift shop and purchase some of the splendid Monk Garden postcards for notes to friends.

A big yellow school bus is just pulling up, about to unload its cargo of joyful, curious students who are headed for the Education Wing and then the Children's Garden.

On your way out, you notice the large wall plaque, containing the names of all the foundations, corporations, families, and individuals who have contributed to the support of the Monk Botanical Gardens. Your name is among them, and you feel very good about that.

