

Halifax Public Gardens

01

Welcome to your Halifax Public Gardens BioKit Circuit. Use the activities in this circuit, along with the HRM Urban BioKit, to explore the natural treasures and unique places in this park – utilizing your keen powers of observation.

Location: The main gates are located at the corner of Spring Garden Road and South Park Street.

Gateway to National History



GPS: N 44° 38.545' W 63° 34.814'

While standing outside the main entrance gates, take notice of the beautiful wrought iron bearing the coat of arms of the old City of Halifax. These magnificent gates were brought to Halifax from Glasgow, Scotland, and have been at the gardens since 1890.

Look carefully at the two coats of arms of Old Halifax on the gates. Do you see the difference between them? What is it?

Take a look at the two people on the coat of arms. What are they?

When you enter the Gardens, you must act with all the manners and class of a Victorian lady or gentleman. Try to find the large stone bearing an odd plaque. Hint: It is here near the gate.

What year were the Gardens made open to the public? _____



Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens



Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens

HISTORY

The Halifax Public Gardens have a rich and unique heritage that dates back to the Victorian era of Halifax. Originally a forested bog, the land was taken over by the Nova Scotia Horticultural Society in 1836 to create a communal area promoting horticulture and botany.

For several decades the gardens were maintained rigorously by the Power family, beginning with Richard Power in 1872. Power believed that the gardens should be works of art and not works of nature, and so he excluded many native species and crafted the gardens in a "gardenesque" style, which favours a certain appearance over what is natural. Therefore, many of the plants growing in the Halifax Public Gardens are not found in the Canadian wilderness.

The gardens maintain many features of the original Victorian Garden created in 1874. In recognition of this unique history, the Halifax Public Gardens was designated a National Historic Site in 1984.

Now prepare yourself for a change in sounds, sights and smells as you travel back in time and enter a world of Victorian splendour, far away from all the loud sounds and smells of the busy streets.

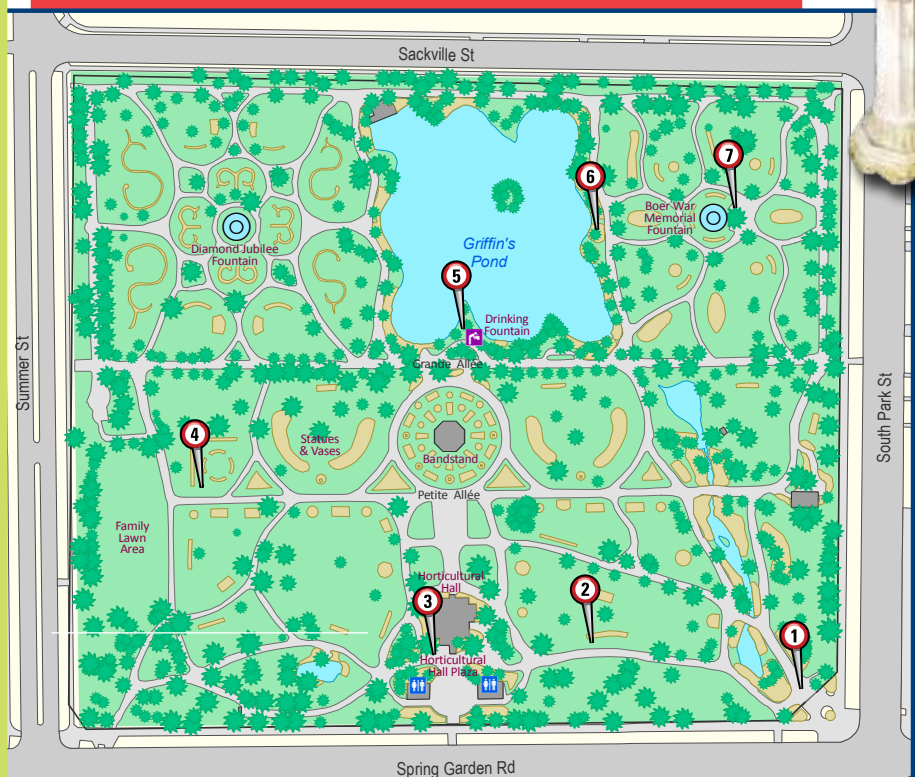
Did You Know?

Bird baths are important for birds living in urban areas, where, generally, less surface is covered by water. Birds, like all living things, need water to survive. On sunny days, it is common to see many different species of birds bathing and cooling down in these baths.

Take a look! How many birds do you see?



Black-capped Chickadee



Map: © HRM

EDIBLE GARDEN

2 GPS: N 44° 38.542' W 63° 34.866

Today, people living in cities very rarely grow all their own food. However, during the era of Queen Victoria, almost everybody on the planet used gardens to grow food. Growing your own food is healthier, cheaper and better for the environment.

The plants you can see at this point are attractive to look at, but believe it or not every plant in the planter in front of you is edible. **Test your observation skills** by trying to match the description with the plants you see in front of you.

Cabbage: Green leaves, purple stems, round head.

Beets: Dark purple roots and stems, and even darker purple leaves.

Swiss Chard: Grows close to the ground, has shiny, green, ribbed leaves, with stems that range from white to red.

Kale: A highly nutritious vegetable, looks like lettuce, grows low to the ground, and is lighter green.

Note: Do not pick plants in the gardens!



Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens

Historical Horticultural Hall

3 GPS: N 44° 38.522' W 63° 34.902'

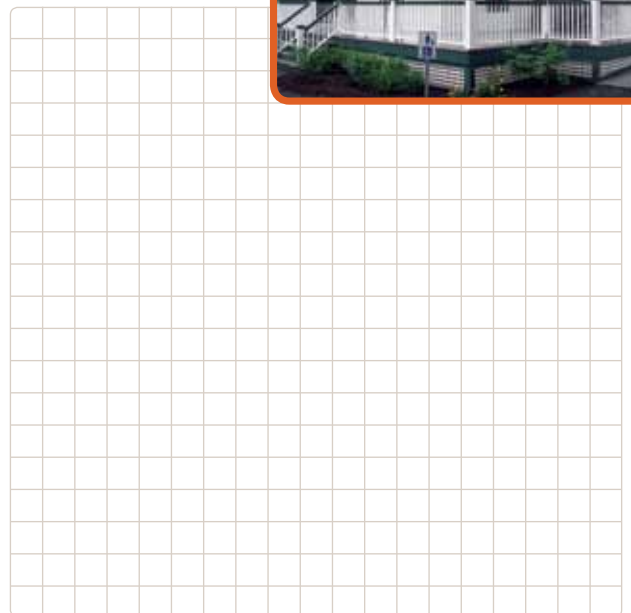
Horticultural Hall was built by the Horticulturalist Society of Nova Scotia in 1847 as a meeting house and as a storage centre for food grown in the gardens. The building before you has changed uses several times, but the structure itself has remained basically unchanged for 160+ years.

Your Creation

Imagine you're a horticultural scientist hired by the Public Gardens to create a new species of plant for unveiling at the next Royal visit! You have been given unlimited money to produce a species of plant by combining the genetic material of plants behind Horticultural Hall. Explore the area and **find your three favourite plants** in the courtyard. Decide what features of these plants you'd include in a super plant, then draw your new species.

The name of your new species:

Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens



DAHLIA BEDS

4

GPS: N 44° 38.547' W 63° 34.987'

Feel free to walk up to the dahlia beds, so that you can see this exotic rainbow of flowers close up. This is one of the few areas of the Public Gardens where walking off the trail to approach plants is allowed. Elsewhere, it is important not to walk off the path – each year the Public Gardens receives over one million visitors, and a great deal of damage would be caused if everyone were permitted to walk on the grass or through beds of plants.



Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens

Colourful Combinations

Originally from Mexico, the dahlia flower became popular in European gardens in the 1830s and has since become a widespread variety of household plant. All varieties of dahlias are descended from one species found in Mexico. The naturally occurring species is white, but as you can see there are hundreds of dahlia varieties with varying shapes, sizes and colours.

List the different colours of dahlia flowers you can see:

Choose your favourite dahlia and describe its

A) shape: _____

B) colour: _____

C) scent: _____



Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens

POND INVADERS

5

South section of Griffin's Pond

GPS: N 44° 38.588' W 63° 34.933'

Griffin's Pond is the largest source of freshwater in the gardens. It is home to many wildlife species, including ducks, geese and other waterfowl. Ponds are constantly under a series of transition. They are created and eventually filled in by soil and the growth of vegetation. Griffin's Pond is still maintained in order to prevent it from filling in with invasive plants, such as the exotic species yellow iris and the native species duckweed.

See if you can identify these species based on the pictures below. Check off the ones you observe.

☐ **Common duckweed**



Photo: © Caroline Savage



☐ **Yellow Iris**



Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens



Photo: © Richard Webb, Budgwood.org

SPECIES AT RISK

6 Northeast section of Griffin's Pond GPS: N 44° 38.611' W 63° 34.908'

The dawn redwood is a conifer originally from China. This tree was unknown until 1941, when it was discovered as a fossil. In fact, this species wasn't extinct – a Chinese scientist discovered a small stand in 1943! This is why the species is considered a "living fossil." Sadly, although common in gardening stores, it is almost extinct in the wild.

The dawn redwood is unusual: it is one of the few species of conifers that lose their leaves in the fall.

Gently touch the needles, and describe the feeling:

Observe its trunk and describe it:

Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens



Concert at Public Gardens

Weeping Giants

7 Close to the Boer War Memorial Fountain GPS: N 44° 38.626' W 63° 34.870'

This enchanted area of the gardens is home to four weeping giants. They are said to be weeping because their branches are turned downwards. They look like large green umbrellas. The three smaller ones are Camperdown elms, and the largest one is a weeping beech.

Victorian Wonderland

Like Alice in Wonderland, lose yourself in the wonders of the surrounding Victorian nature...

Approach the weeping beech. Like a natural-tree-house, this mighty giant has been providing shelter to people in the gardens for many years. But for how long?

1. Use string or a small branch from the ground to measure all the way around the tree (its circumference), about 1.5 metres from the ground.
2. As you measure the circumference, count every 2.5 centimetres as one year of the tree's life.*
3. Make your best guess as to the tree's age (see below for the answer).



Approximately how old do you think the tree is?

* This formula varies according to the species and climate.

Photo: © Friends of Halifax Public Gardens



Weeping beech

Answer: The weeping beech was approximately 108 years old when measured by this method in 2009.

Resources:

- Halifax Public Gardens
halifaxpublicgardens.ca
- The Dahlia Society of Nova Scotia
dahlianovascotia.com
- Wild About Gardening
wildaboutgardening.org
- Biosphere
ec.gc.ca/biosphere