



Olbrich Botanical Gardens

Fact Sheet

Updated May, 2012

Historical Note

In the early part of the 20th Century, Michael B. Olbrich partnered with the City of Madison and the Madison Parks and Pleasure Drive Association to insure that land along the east shore of Lake Monona was preserved for parklands on Madison's East Side. His commitment to public/private partnership and the commitment of the John Olin Foundation not only created Olbrich Park, but also inspired the formation of Olbrich Botanical Gardens and the public/private partnership that makes it possible.

Public Access

Year-round:

Bolz Conservatory, Library, Gift Shop, 10 am – 4 pm Mon.–Sat.

Conservatory and Gift shop, 10 am–5 pm Sundays

Outdoor Garden Hours:

April – September, 8 am – 8 pm

October, 9 am – 6 pm

November – March, 9 am – 4 pm

Free Public Garden:

Outdoor gardens – always free admission

Bolz Conservatory - \$2 for ages 6 and up; free to ages 5 and under; free to all 10 - noon Weds. & Sat.

Annual Attendance: Approximately 250,000 annually between 9 am and 4 pm

(Additional visitors are not counted before 9 am or after 4 pm)

Private Uses (rentals):

Approximately 1,200 private uses annually which include wedding ceremonies, wedding receptions, parties, corporate meetings and events, memorial services, garden club meetings, business meetings, school tours, formal photography, guided tours, etc.

Population & Growth

Attendance

- Olbrich Botanical Gardens' attendance has quadrupled from approximately 60,000 in 1990 to 245,180+ in 2011. This is an increase of more than 300%.
- The increase in everyday visitors at Olbrich has paralleled the Madison metropolitan region's population increases in the past 20 years. Based on population growth estimates, in 2025 Olbrich attendance will be, conservatively, 325,000 visitors.

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Events

- In 2011, there were almost 8 times as many days when special events were offered as in 1992, the first full year of operations for the new Olbrich Botanical Center building.
- In 1992, nine days of special event programs were offered to the general public. In 2011, Olbrich offered more than 70 days of special event programs to the general public. This is an increase of nearly 700%.

Education:

- In 2011, Olbrich offered almost 14 times the number of educational programs offered in 1992.
- Thirteen classes were offered in 1992 and 177 were offered in 2011. This is an increase of more than 1,200%.
 - More than 2,200 individuals served annually through education classes, including adults, youth, and families
 - Approximately 1,300 school children participate annually in Olbrich's Explorer Program
 - Olbrich's Schumacher Library provides gardening answers for 6,000 visitors annually
 - Olbrich's eco-friendly tram provides interpretive and transportation services in the outdoor gardens for approximately 9,000 people annually, especially those who need assistance to move around the gardens
 - More than 1,000 adult visitors participate in docent-guided tours of Olbrich annually

Outdoor Gardens Development

Developments in Olbrich's award-winning outdoor gardens since the Olbrich Botanical Center building and Bolz Conservatory opened in 1991 include:

The Wildflower Garden; Sunken Garden; Perennial Garden; Donors Arbor; Flowering Grove; Japanese Courtyard; Discovery Dock; Atrium Shade Garden; Thai Pavilion and Garden; Serenity Garden and Flowering Cherry Grove; Rose Garden; Event Garden; Herb Garden improvements; Starkweather Creek Shade Garden and Birch Alee; Lussier Terrace Garden; Tram Path; and several Meadow Gardens, Rain Gardens, and Gravel Gardens. *(All of these are developments within the existing footprint of the Botanical Gardens except the Thai Pavilion and Garden.)*

Financial Support

Public/Private Partnership:

The public/private partnership between the City of Madison Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society is considered one of the most successful of its kind both regionally and in the public garden field. The two entities share equally in funding the gardens, keeping them free, providing inspirational gardening ideas, and offering educational programs that neither could do on its own.

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Membership:

- In 2011, Olbrich had more than three times as many member households supporting the Gardens as in 1990.
- In 1990, Olbrich had approximately 1,800 member households. In 2011, Olbrich had more than 6,200 member households (representing nearly 9,000 individuals, based on membership cards issued). This is an increase in member households of almost 250 %.
- Approximately one in every 41 adults in Dane County is an Olbrich member, making Olbrich one of the largest membership organizations in the region.

Public Support: Olbrich Botanical Gardens earned \$200,000 in revenues in 2011 that directly offset the City of Madison's total support of \$1,425,000, leaving a net of \$1,225,000 in direct public support.

Private Support:

The Olbrich Botanical Society raises approximately \$1.4 million each year from earned revenue (special events and sales) and donations (including membership dues), including endowment disbursements of approximately \$166,500. The majority of the donated funds are from individuals who contribute \$1,000 or less.

Endowment:

The Olbrich Botanical Society Foundation was created in 2001 to manage an endowment for the Gardens. Bequests, planned gifts, and other designated donations are transferred to the Foundation's endowment fund. Each year a distribution is made from the Foundation to support the Gardens' operating budget.

Economic Impact**Support of Local Business:**

- 250,000 + annual visitors shop in local stores, eat at local restaurants, and stay at local hotels. Private rentals of Olbrich facilities support local caterers and other vendors.
- Olbrich contributes substantially to neighborhood revitalization. As the Gardens grow, Olbrich's role in neighborhood revitalization on the greater Eastside increases.

Green Jobs:

Olbrich provides good-paying jobs in a green environment for its permanent 39 regular staff members. Both the City of Madison and Olbrich Botanical Society provide excellent employee benefits, including health insurance, for regular employees who work at least 20 hours per week. In addition, 7.25 FTE's, primarily interns and tram drivers, are hired on a seasonal basis.

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Quality of Life:

Olbrich Botanical Gardens is frequently cited as one of the many reasons that Madison is such a highly rated city.

- 2004 - *Horticulture Magazine* named Olbrich Botanical Gardens one of the 10 most inspirational gardens in the country.
- 2005 – Olbrich Botanical Gardens received the Garden of Excellence award from the American Public Garden Association.
- 2007 – Olbrich Botanical Gardens voted the number one gardens and horticulture attraction in Wisconsin in the people’s choice “Wonders of Wisconsin” contest.
- 2008 – Olbrich Botanical Gardens included on Mayor Cieslewicz’s Top 10 TNS (The Natural Step) projects demonstrating effective use of Madison’s designated green planning process, The Natural Step.
- 2011 – Olbrich Botanical Gardens’ Rose Garden selected for an Honor Award by the American Society of Landscape Architects, Wisconsin Chapter. The Rose Garden, designed by Ken Saiki Design, has been enjoyed by more than two million visitors since it opened in June 2005.
- 2012 -- Olbrich Botanical Gardens is named one of “Our Favorite Public Gardens” in the United States by *Country Gardens* magazine, a Better Homes and Gardens special interest publication.

Community

Volunteers: 600+ area residents donate more than 26,000 hours of labor to Olbrich each year as volunteers; they report volunteering enriches their lives and gives them an opportunity to give back to the community.

Partnerships:

- Olbrich is home to the Thai Pavilion and Garden, the result of a partnership with the University of Wisconsin Alumni Association, Thailand, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Olbrich’s cooperation with community groups and neighborhood associations includes:
 - Educational signage along Starkweather Creek
 - Increased emphasis on multi-mode access including bussing and biking
 - Collaborative education programming with the Madison School Community Recreation, Neighborhood House-East, East Madison Community Center, and the Madison Public Library

Accessibility: Olbrich demonstrates a commitment to diverse audiences through programs such as the free electric tram, scooters, and wheelchairs; Children of the Rainforest; Children’s Kitchen Garden Programming; and Thai Fest.

Free Public Events:

Olbrich Gardens enriches the lives of visitors and neighbors by providing a number of free community events and hosting events organized by mission-related organizations such as garden clubs. These events include more than two dozen free concerts, garden club flower shows, art exhibits, educational exhibits, and a fall and spring multi-week flower show.

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Environmental Commitment

Green Mission: Olbrich has dedicated itself to eco-friendly sustainable gardening, and to sharing its professional knowledge with the public through example and an active education program.

Green Team: Olbrich's Green Team was developed to empower staff to suggest positive changes in operations for improved sustainability. Mayor Cieslewicz included Olbrich on his list of 2008 Top 10 TNS (The Natural Step) projects which demonstrate effective use of Madison's designated green planning process, The Natural Step.

Travel Green Certified: Olbrich is a certified Travel Green Wisconsin destination. This program certifies tourism organizations and businesses committed to reducing their environmental impact.

Leaf Mulch:

Olbrich Gardens uses leaf mulch produced on site from locally collected leaves. This environmentally friendly product has many benefits:

- It protects plants by controlling soil erosion and retaining moisture while adding nutrients and improving soil structure.
- The City's Streets Department saves gas and time by delivering a portion of local leaves collected in the fall to Olbrich rather than to the recycle centers in Waunakee and Verona.
- Leaf mulch has proven such a benefit to Olbrich Gardens' soil that there is a local demand from amateur gardeners for the product which is packaged and sold in spring and fall – diverting more leaves from recycling centers and also providing financial support for the Gardens.

The Gardens' Future

Through a series of community collaboration sessions held in the summer of 2007, the following options were identified for the future of the Gardens:

- additional programming space to meet the educational needs of a growing population, including children, families, schools, and adults
- additional space to accommodate basic visitor needs, including orientation, restrooms, and food service
- a new indoor/outdoor children's/home demonstration garden
- initiatives to sustain the Starkweather Creek shoreline
- development of an Urban Tree Laboratory
- revitalization of the Rock Garden, transforming it into a Dry Garden
- comprehensive interpretation for visitors
- increased children's and adult programming, both on- and off-site
- increasing the diversity of visitors who participate at Olbrich including seniors, children, less able-bodied, and minority visitors
- continued commitment to sustainability improvements as budgets allow

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