



Secret Gardens

South Africa is a paradise of private gardens, some of which are open to the public. So why not take some time to take a trip down the garden path this Spring?

Text: Fiona Zerbst | **Images:** © Brenthurst, Shepstone Gardens, Soekershof, Makaranga Garden Lodge





Imagine a garden with a BMW as a centrepiece; an aloe growing out of its bonnet. Yes, such a garden exists – and yes, you can view it on one of the many tours that take visitors around some of South African's most wacky, beautiful, and award-winning private gardens.

These private gardens are not open to the public all the time, and visits are often by appointment only, with guides in attendance. But don't let this put you off – our secret gardens are blooming with diversity and loveliness.

Brenthurst

One of the most impressive is undoubtedly Brenthurst Gardens in Houghton, Johannesburg, managed by Strilli Oppenheimer and maintained by head gardener, Dawid Klopper.

Visitors can stroll through the Highveld Grass Garden; the Fragrant Bell Garden, with a Cape slave bell at

its centre; and the Labyrinth, where low hedges have been set in a Celtic trefoil pattern, allowing for a meditative walk among twisting, turning paths. The Japanese garden was designed by Yasuo Kitayama, a world-renowned landscaper from Kyoto, and there are Japanese gardeners on hand to share their expertise. The 18-metre waterfall, large pond, traditional pebble beach and tea ceremony house are well worth seeing.

The gardens cover 16 hectares in total, so prepare to spend a couple of hours exploring. To tour the gardens, contact Brenthurst on +27 11 646 4122, or email thegarden@brenthurstgardens.co.za.

Shepstone Gardens

Another Johannesburg garden worth visiting is Shepstone Gardens, situated on one of the ridges of the Witwatersrand. Boasting 17 koi-filled natural clearwater →

There are more than 2,400 different registered succulents in the 11,000 square metre garden, including the oldest cactus in South Africa, dating from around 1910.



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ponds, the gardens are expansive and beautifully maintained. The venue is popular for garden weddings and other private functions. For more information, phone Ken on +27 82 909 3669 or email vikee@shepstonegardens.co.za.

Soekershof

Soekershof in Robertson, Cape Town, was originally a succulent garden created by Marthinus Malherbe, who is now buried here. There are more than 2,400 different registered succulents in the 11,000 square metre garden, including the oldest cactus in South Africa, dating from around 1910. In addition, Soekershof claims to have the world's largest hedge maze, the net surface of which is 13,870 square metres!

The Philosopher's Garden is a new addition while a Japanese Garden is currently under construction. Soekershof is also one of 31 Fair Trade tourism businesses in South Africa. To book a tour, phone +27 23 626 4134 or email soekershof@lando.co.za.

Makaranga Garden Lodge

In KwaZulu-Natal, the place to visit is the authentic Japanese Garden at Makaranga Garden Lodge in Kloof, Durban. Makaranga's setting is 30 acres of private botanical gardens with the Japanese Garden as the jewel in the crown. Bridges, stone lanterns and hand-carved statues have been imported from Japan and the koi ponds add the finishing touch.

There are 18 ponds and waterways in Makaranga's wheelchair-friendly gardens, with Shona and Italian statues among the indigenous and exotic trees adding to the ambience. Makaranga has been named for its beautiful Makaranga trees, which are typically found in rainforests. For more information, phone +27 21 430 5302 or email info@africanpridehotels.com.

Coffeebeans Routes

For something a little different – and to visit the garden with the BMW at its centre – book a Private Garden Route tour through Coffeebeans Routes.

The tour will take you to visit the award-winning garden of Alan Grant in Higgovale – this is a five-level garden on the slopes of Table Mountain. You can also visit another award-winning garden in Hangberg, Hout Bay, which was created with the help of children from the informal settlement in the

area. Part indigenous, part decorative, it is wholly unique.

Other gardens on the route are Fezeka Gardens in Guguletu (an oasis of vegetables and plants managed by octogenarians, which thrives amid shacks and pylons); a garden on a Hanover Park pavement; one that is a tribute to Cape Town sailors lost at sea, and one named after a local Klopse group. To book a tour, contact Iain on +27 21 424 3572 or email routes@coffeebeansroutes.com.

Go-to Garden Shows

The Addo Rose & Garden Show promises to delight visitors with its blend of garden tours, farm stalls, fresh produce and jazz. Not to mention the thousands of roses to admire. The show takes place from 9th – 11th October at the Sundays River Valley, Addo. For more information, visit www.addorose.co.za.

The Bedford Garden Festival will be held from 23rd – 25th October, in the Eastern Cape. Explore the various garden routes, browse through the craft market or attend gardening workshop demos and talks. Visit www.bedford-gardens.co.za for more information.

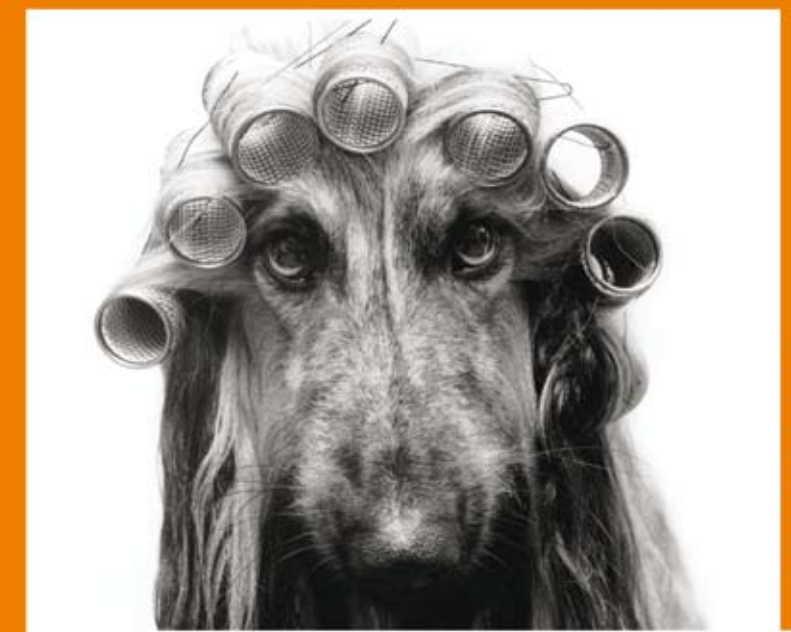


Shepstone Gardens is a popular Johannesburg wedding venue



Just some of the thousands of succulents and cacti at Soekershof

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