

Are we
there
yet?



FAMILY FUN

Glorious Gardens

Enjoy year-round exhibits and events that embody the changing seasons

There's no better place to experience the wonderment of outdoors than at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, a family-friendly destination and one of Virginia's best-kept secrets.

For decades, the Garden has educated the region about the plant world, promoted top-notch horticultural and landscape design, and led in botanical and applied horticultural research. Sitting on historic property with more than 40 acres of gardens and 200 orchids, the Garden boasts a bevy of amazing sights. One of the biggest is the classical domed conservatory—the only one of its kind in the mid-Atlantic—called the “Jewel of the Garden.” This 11,000-square-foot complex is home to exotic plants from around the world and features beautiful seasonal displays. Crowned by a 63-foot-tall dome, the conservatory includes a central Palm House, a semi-tropical wing featuring an orchid collection and two wings with revolving displays.

The Garden is beautiful year-round, and there is almost

always something in bloom. You can even look beyond the flowers and appreciate the barks, berries, foliage and seed pods across the illustrious landscape. Perhaps most impressive are the special exhibits held every few months. These exhibits draw in visitors from around the world and leave families in a state of awe. Better yet, they're inexpensive and educational, and they offer visitors an inside look at the complete metamorphosis and tranquility of nature.

The newest exhibit is “Butterflies LIVE!,” a Robins Foundation-supported program that features hundreds of butterflies as part of a metamorphosis-themed 25th anniversary celebration. The exhibit is held between May 22 and October 11, and for only a few dollars, families can walk through the north wing of the conservatory and experience exotic tropical butterflies in free flight, feeding on nectar plants and swarming around fruit. When they're not in flight, and depending on the weather, the butterflies may be “roosting” on the undersides of leaves, their

wings folded and colors available for all to see.

If you love the various shapes and patterns of butterflies, this is the place to be. The exhibit is aflutter with more than two dozen species in varying colors and sizes, affording attendees a unique chance to admire the beautiful insects up close. The blue morpho, tangerine-colored Julia, translucent glasswing and red cracker are just a few of the tropical varieties that will be on display. These and many others come from exotic regions around the world and are shipped to the Garden as pupa wrapped in cotton. Most of the butterflies on display come from Costa Rica, a country that possesses some of the most species-rich habitats in the world.

As you walk through the conservatory, pointing out the brilliant colors and graceful movements of these insects, you may have a question or two. Thankfully, there are resident experts on hand to answer any of your questions. Each species has an amazing back story, including how they were given their names, what genus they belong to and their roles in the insect class. If you're still eager to learn more, you can visit the Education and Library Complex on-site, where you can read about how these majestic creatures make a home for themselves in rainforests and other environments.

This summer, if you're looking for a quaint destination offering a calm and colorful setting, look to the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. With plenty of kid-oriented activities and adult-friendly options, there's something for everybody. Take a peek at nature's beauty, and discover an environment where butterflies can spread their wings and children can expand their minds.

To learn more, or to get a sneak peek at the current and upcoming exhibits, visit www.lewisginter.org.

— Nicholas Addison Thomas



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