

## Ways Municipalities Use New Plants: How We Work in Nantes

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The city of Nantes owes its horticultural status to its maritime history. The new plants brought back by the navigators and ship owners of the city were planted in the Apothecary Garden, before it became part of the Royal Botanic Garden, which itself comes under the Paris Museum. Those seafarers were responsible for introducing numerous plants into Europe, such as *Magnolia grandiflora*, the Virginia tulip tree, *Liquidamber*, *Sassafras*, and so on. Several Mayors of Nantes were also botanists, including Ferdinand Favre, who developed camellia culture at the turn of the century.

Nantes also has a mild, coastal, Gulf Stream climate, and soil with a low limestone content, which suited many of the new plants being brought back from overseas.

Thus the current Department of Green Spaces and the Environment is continuing a tradition of enthusiasm for new plants. At Nantes these are cultivated for two reasons: as botanical collections in their own right and for utilitarian uses. The collections are now being entered in the Conservatory of Generalised Plant Collections, which is being looked after by the Association of Botanical Parks and Gardens in France. The collections include *Magnolia*, *Quercus*, *Lonicera*, *Ilex*, *Iris*, *Viburnum*, *Camellia*, and *Rosa*. The plantings serve mainly as a conservatory for collections of rare plants and are, therefore, of educational value to the public. Each park has one or more complete collections, and conducted tours of the collections are available to the public.

New plants are either bought or exchanged with other botanic gardens. Some are raised from seedlings on our own nurseries, such as *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Bleu Nantais'. We are currently working on a new sequoia with a very dense habit.

Our collections also act as a source of breeding or propagation material to provide plants with characteristics required for modern usage, such as ground cover plants to reduce the need for chemical weed control; narrow-crowned trees for planting in narrow streets; the selection of self-cleaning plants within the buddleia, camellia, rose, and potentilla families.

The most revolutionary plant we have dealt with has been the ground cover rose. It appeared at a time when costs of managing public open space were increasing dramatically, but it enabled Nantes to increase its green space from 500 to 600 ha without increasing personnel.

We are interested not only in the proper management of public spaces to enhance our city's reputation but also in the promotion of horticulture and the love of plants. We must be a show-case for professionals.