

Created by: Debra C. Argen
Martinique Gardens

[Martinique](#) is called the "island of flowers" for a very good reason as evidenced while visiting [Le Jardin de Balata](#).

Tropical flowers excite the senses with their spectacular beauty and the richness in the intense hues of their blooms. They have a unique fragrance all their own, and there is an exoticness in their forms that capture the imagination, as well as many an artist's brush and a photographer's lens. Martinique is indeed a tropical paradise of exotic flowers in every shade of the rainbow.



Edward F. Nesta and I were in Martinique in April 2006, and our eyes as well as our cameras were captivated by the bold reds of the cone-shaped alpinias, the dazzling display of hibiscus in shades of blushing pink, daring fuchsia, lipstick red, delicate salmon and striking tangerine that covered the trees. Driving over 440-miles on an island that is 50-miles long and 24-miles wide during a week-long stay on Martinique, provided us with the opportunity to experience its natural beauty. We saw magnificent orchids, bromeliad covered trees, brightly colored bougainvillea, soaring palm trees and majestic bamboo forests, growing wildly on the hills, along the roads, as well as cultivated in private and in public gardens, and also saw sugar cane and banana plantations.

Martinique has a diverse topography; the Atlantic Ocean borders the east side of the island and the Caribbean Sea borders the west side, with deep verdant valleys and breathtaking elevations of 4,600 feet in between. Aptly named the "island of flowers", Martinique has many gardens to visit, each offering visitors with its own botanical perspective.



One of the gardens that we visited was Le Jardin de Balata in Fort-de-France, where Mr. Jean-Philippe Thoze has created a garden paradise. Mr. Thoze grew up visiting his grandmother on the property that is now Le Jardin de Balata. We began our tour in the museum that was once Mr. Thoze's grandmother's house, where he spent his holidays as a child. When the 3-hectare property and now 100+ year-old house became available, he bought the property and began creating the garden in 1982, which he opened to the

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public in April 1986.



He developed a series of glorious gardens, which consist of a spectacular collection of over 3000 species of plants, in the tropical, rainforest, and high altitude gardens. Each garden that Mr. Thoze created is unique, each with its own mosaic of color, patterns, fragrance, and style.



We took a tour of the gardens with Madame Annick Jubenoi, who explained Mr. Thoze's philosophy that "a collection of plants without harmony is not very interesting." Not to worry, Mr. Thoze has created interesting harmonious gardens of bromeliads, coleus, orchids, hibiscus, bamboo forests, majestic palms, water lilies, and so much more, that you need to spend several hours at Le Jardin de Balata to really appreciate the world that he has created.



One particularly unusual flower at the garden that caught my eye was the Porcelain Rose, (*Nicolaia elatior*), which originates from Indonesia, and is a surreal beauty standing proud and tall in the garden. It has an almost sculptural look, as if indeed, it was cast in porcelain or sculpted from wax, and its colors range from shades of pink to shades of red, outlined with white.



Other exotic beauties at the garden included tropically painted Heliconias with their bright colors of red, green and yellow, Birds of Paradise, Torch Lily, Torch Ginger, and Anthurium. As I was leaving Le Jardin de Balata, in a purely serendipitous moment, my camera captured a gecko poised on a bright pink anthurium, that was definitely a magic moment for me.

Le Jardin de Balata is open daily from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, except during the month of September when the

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garden is closed for renovation. Admission is charged. Allow for a few hours to visit and fully appreciate this lovely tranquil oasis.



Le Jardin de Balata

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