

DOWN THE GARDEN PATH

A TRIP THROUGH QUEBEC OFFERS SHELLEY CAMERON-McCARRON
A BOUNTY OF BEAUTY AND HISTORY

1 A young chef carries hors d'oeuvres down the garden path as I savour my first sight of Les Jardins de Métis, the former fishing lodge from which horticultural pioneer Elsie Reford started carving a garden paradise in the eastern end of Quebec in the 1920s. I've wanted to explore this national historic site on the confluence of the Mitis and St. Lawrence rivers since hearing Montrealers rave about it a decade ago. Now, in the soft hue of evening, as wildflowers scent the breeze, I understand its pull.

This is one stop on the Gardens of Quebec, a route of some 20 gardens stretching from Gatineau to Gaspésie (think wine route, but with flora and fauna instead). They welcome two million paying visitors each summer. Consider these five gardens the must-see highlights. **Z**

1. Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens Wooden bridges, lilies along the Long Walk, sweeping views and fabulous luncheon fare to boot, all a result of 30 years of Reford's labour after she inherited the land from her uncle, railway baron George Stephen. Her legacy lives on: her great-grandson, Alexander Reford, is now the site director.



2. The Montreal Botanical Garden is one of the world's most spectacular, with more than 180 acres to explore. When the garden was founded

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by Frère Marie-Victorin during the Great Depression, it employed thousands of out-of-work Montrealers. The garden houses one of North America's most impressive rose collections.

3. Parc du Bois-de-Coulonge in Quebec City continues the beauty and magic with sugar maples, red oaks and American elms. The residence of lieutenant-governors from 1870 to 1966, it's now a majestic public park. **4. At Montreal's Maison Saint-Gabriel**, walk through the ordered rows and companion plantings of a settler's garden begun in 1668 by Marguerite Bourgeois.

5. Jardin botanique Roger-Van den Hende at Université Laval is a relaxing six-hectare educational garden with nearly 4,000 species grouped by botanical family. See Shopping Guide on page 129 for more information.