

Villandry: Beautiful Chateau, Fantastic Garden

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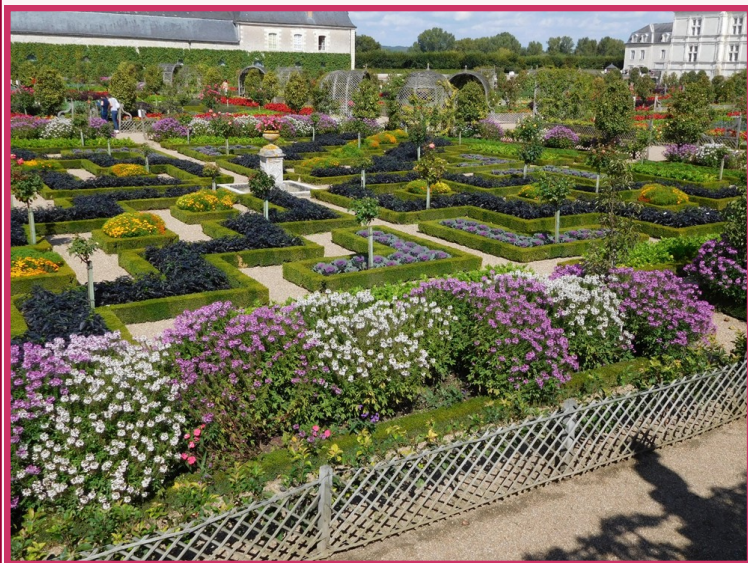
Many visitors to France come to tour the famous chateaux of the Loire Valley. Amongst the most visited is Villandry. Many come to visit the chateau, but most visitors come for only one reason: to immerse themselves in the unique gardens maintained around the chateau.

The History

Villandry is situated southwest of Paris near Tours. Tours is often the starting point for tourists wishing to tour the many chateaux that are found along the Loire River. Villandry was constructed during the renaissance in 1536 by the minister of finance to King Francois I. The chateau had a few different owners up until 1906 when Joachim Carvallo, a scientist, originally from Spain, bought the property and decided to dedicate the rest of his life to its restoration. He first renovated the chateau and restored the façade and architecture to the original renaissance style. He then turned his attentions to the gardens. His passion was to restore the gardens to their original design. He carried out this restoration between 1908 and 1918, painstakingly researching archives for original drawings from the 16th century.



The Gardens Today



Today, the recreated renaissance era gardens are organized in four terraces at different levels. The garden at the highest level is the Garden of the Sun (le jardin du soleil), and it consists of three chambers of green foliage. The second terrace is a water garden (jardin d'eau), and serves as part of a system of canals that run through the property which are used for irrigation and the various fountains around the chateau. The pond is in the shape of a mirror. The third terrace is a decorative garden (le jardin decorative); and the fourth garden, which is the most spectacular part of the entire garden, is the Decorative Vegetable Garden (Le jardin potage decorative). All the gardens can be viewed from the garden level, or a visitor can walk around the gardens on a path covered by trellises full of vines, overlooking the gardens.

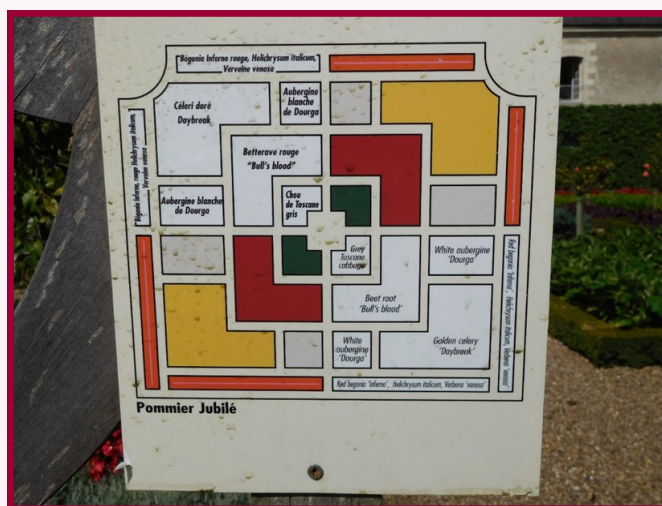
The vegetable garden is unique. It is a garden planted with vegetables, fruit trees and flowers in a beautiful, creative manner. This garden is the closest to the chateau and was filled with vegetables that were discovered in the Americas and brought back to France. In the 16th century, the owners of the property used this as their testing ground while acclimatizing these "rare" vegetables to the French climate. The planting of vegetables was, and is, central to the design of these gardens; but the addition of the flowers, shrubs and fruit trees combine for a spectacular garden.



The decorative vegetable garden is planted two times every year. The horticulturists choose different vegetables every year. The first planting in the spring may consist of peas, beans, radish, lentils, cabbage, chives, and several types of lettuce. In the summer, the horticulturists choose among artichokes, several types of eggplant, purple basil, celery, celeriac, fennel, parsnip, peppers, tomatoes, and Swiss chard for a garden that not only pleases the eye but produces food for consumption.

Each quadrant in the decorative vegetable garden is signed with the current season's plantings.

The decorative vegetable gardens are bordered by manicured boxwood. Also, there are many fruit trees, mostly dwarfs, in this garden, both espaliered and normally pruned.



A lot more could be said about the gardens, but viewing the photos gives a clearer picture of the beauty found at Villandry.

The chateau with a small part of the decorative vegetable garden



The decorative gardens



Part of the decorative vegetable garden with begonia border



For more information about Villandry, including more photos with overviews of the gardens and gardening advice from the horticulturist, go to

<http://www.chateauvillandry.fr/en/>

References

Le Château de Villandry et Ses Jardins, by Caroline Piat, 2015

Photos by Sue Strauss