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Photo: The New York Times

Spring in the City

By PAULA DEITZ

Finally, New York's trees and gardens, so long stuck in a kind of suspended animation, have shaken off winter. When the rain ended abruptly last week, the whole city burst into bloom simultaneously rather than in the usual sequential order. Now's the moment to get outside, walk on the city's side streets under canopies of white Callery pears and head for a favorite spot to see your favorite spring blooms, or just sit in the newly green grass.

Central Park's woodland setting may be pure artifice, but when those first green shoots and purple crocuses poke through the brown blanket of fallen leaves, they appear like a tender hope. The crocuses have already come and gone, so have the cascades of chrome-yellow forsythia flowing over massive stone retaining walls.

Now though, you can dash — as I have in the last few days — from park to park around the city, seeking out favorite sites

and exploring new ones, to take in spring at the height of its showiness. But catch it quickly — it's glorious but fleeting! Here are prime spots to soak up the season. (Some gardens charge admission; more information is available on the Web sites below.)

CENTRAL PARK RESERVOIR

During Kyoto's sakura or cherry blossom viewing season, the pale Yoshino cherries are the trees that line the canal along Philosopher's Walk, where blossoms drift away on the water. In New York the best is to observe the clear blue sky through a foam of blossoms above the gnarled gray trunks.

While there are many adies around town of the double-gold cherry blossoms (Cwan-

nan), a stroll around the park's 1.6-mile reservoir affords a chance for total immersion in vast groves as they arch over the path on the West Side. Seen from the East Side, especially at dusk, they appear as a blur of cloud formations over the spired silhouettes of the reservoir's pretty cast-iron and steel ornamental fence. Beyond the stands of cotton candy pink are other varieties of cherry, branching out splendidly, with names like Okame, Sargent and Mount Fuji.

CONSERVATORY GARDEN, CENTRAL PARK

This seems to be everyone's private garden, blessedly public, with corners to match every mood: protected corners for reflection, exuberant sunny spaces and playful fountains. Right now spring is unfolding in woodland slopes in the south garden with a mélange of scilla, Chionodoxa luteicapitata and pulmonaria, punctuated by brilliant splashes of daffodils.

In the English-style garden below, *mag-*

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Read
about
Jefferson
Market
Garden

Yellow magnolias in the Scholar's Garden at Staten Island Botanical Gardens.

MUMMICHAMMUS 9:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.,
Tuesdays through Sundays.

WAVE HILL

As a public garden surrounding a former-

West 24th Street and Independence Avenue, Riverdale, the Bronx, (718) 549-1295,
wavehill.org, Tuesdays through Sundays, 9
a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN

On my early spring walks with Judith D. Zuk, former president of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, she would pause by the pre-

Additional images of flowering areas
mentioned in this article:
nytimes.com/arts

It's Spring in New York, Finally. So Who Needs April in Paris?



Alex Gomez with a magnolia blossom at Corleone Hook Park, Lower East Side.

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solia trees, both *indulgens* and *stellata*, anchor corners of the planting beds, where grape hyacinth and anemone blanda hold their own along the borders against periwinkle, aspen-like hedges that form the bones of the garden. Next to the entrance, a collection of heliophiles in various shades of green to pink is an outstanding feature of the south garden. The dramatic central abides of crab-apples in dark pink and white are in bloom, and their blossoms will soon blend with the shades of 21,000 purple, pink and white tulips planted in abstract waves in the north garden around French-style parterres of clipped germander scrolls. No wonder birders flock here to be photographed.

Fifth Avenue and 20th Street, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., through Monday; 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., May through August (closed this Wednesday).

THE FRICK COLLECTION

Among the first signs of spring is the blue-tinted of these magnolias along the classical facade of the Frick Collection on 20th Avenue. Stately and beautifully pruned, they are best viewed from inside, looking out from the Fragrant Room, where you are transported back to Jean-Benoit Fragonard's own 18th-century salon in France. That's where he hung the buxus wall panels depicting "The Progress of Love," an elegant romp of lovers through garden scenes that appeared seamless with the garden landscape outside the windows, as they do now at the Frick. From behind the transparent curtains, a visitor can imagine inhabiting a chateau of one's own, with the luxury of enjoying the frosty park landscapes inside and out. On the Frick's east side, a facade of arched niches and Ionic planters surrounds Russell Page's formal French garden, where winter's willow can be tracing along the trellises.



Yellow magnolias in the Scholar's Garden at Staten Island Botanical Gardens.



Central Park is a prime spot for cherry blossom viewing, to observe the blue sky through a foam of blossoms above the gray trunks.

1 East 70th Street, (212) 280-1700, frick.org; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sundays; closed Mondays and holidays.

THE SHAKESPEARE GARDEN, CENTRAL PARK
The Shakespeare Garden's original purpose (though no longer followed to the letter) was to feature flowers mentioned by Shakespeare in his plays and poetry. Planted along a steep, rocky slope beneath Belvedere Castle, the garden paths wind between the Delacorte Theater and the Marjorie C. G. Garden. With its rustic benches and fountains, it has the character of a medieval garden. Sadly, an ancient mulberry tree, an anchor of the garden, fell last year, but the beds are filled now with a tapestry of spring blossoms: tulips, hyacinths, crocuses and primroses. Watching spring emerge here, or summer or fall, for that matter, is itself a kind of theater.

Enter Central Park from 79th Street and Central Park West.

THE CLOISTERS

Spring arrived at the Cloisters last week when the glass panes were removed from the arcades of the Cloister that protected fragile plants like olive, jasmine, orange and bay, wintering over in the inner walkway. They are taken outdoors to the Rosemont Center, where four quince trees at its center are about to blossom, in delicate white with a pink cast, above beds of heliophiles. Also in bloom nearby are two pear trees enfolded in the six-arm palm-tree form.

Susan Moody, the horticulturist for the last 25 years, is stepping down, leaving a legacy of orderly medieval beauty based on meticulous research going back to Charlemagne's ninth-century account of species on his estates. Most recently, she added a flowering meadow below the high back wall overlooking the Hudson River, planted with Lady Apple trees, caraway poppies, bachelor buttons, daffodils and a spirea hedge, promising riotous color as the season progresses.

Fort Tryon Park (752) 823-2700, metmuseum.org; 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Tuesdays through Sundays.

WAVE HILL

As a public garden surrounding a former-

Spring and the City



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ly private estate on the Hudson River, Wave Hill retains a domestic scale with a fine horticultural tradition. At the moment, the low-growing flower called Glory-of-the-snow (*Chionodoxa sardensis*) blankets the hillside, and garden areas in a cool wave of gentian blue occasionally mixed with the frills of a white variety. Along the irregular paths of the hillside Wild Garden, dominated by yews clipped in cloud formations, plants are making daily appearances in arched juxtaposition: purple pulmonaria, species tulips in yellow striped with red, grape hyacinths and bellflowers with creamy yellow to a deep purple.

West 24th Street and Independence Avenue, Riverdale, the Bronx, (718) 549-2295, wavehill.org; Tuesdays through Sundays; 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Designed by the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury, a devotee of the British horticultural world, the garden has created for the first time an Auricula Theater, a display on narrow shelves of rare cultivars of velvety primroses under a prominent arch surrounded by painted wooden awnings of drapery (through May 13). Since the yellow alpine Primula auricula was crossed with the red and blue Primula lutea in the 16th century to produce a spectrum of purple and yellow petals and centers, a fad developed for these cultivars among 17th-century Huguenot weavers in France and Belgium. They devised showcase theaters to protect the fragile plants from the elements. The triumphal results of this difficult horticultural technique may also be seen in "Primrose Palette," an exhibition of hundreds of auriculas in the display house of the Macmillan-Gorgiana Niles Greenhouses.

200th Street and Kew Gardens Boulevard, Bedford Park, the Bronx, (718) 827-6700, nybg.org; Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

STATEN ISLAND BOTANICAL GARDEN

In this tranquil, 15th-century-style Ming Dynasty garden, every tree and plant is treated as a singular work of art. As you wander through courtyards into a northeast and across bridges to the moon-viewing pavilion, each tree becomes memorable for its shape and branching patterns seen against white-washed walls as part of the garden's decorative scheme.

This week Korean statiks, a low Chinese-styled tree and red berries of the mandarin shrub, along with a yellow magnolia, bring texture and color to the stark spaces. As at the Frick, you have the sense of inhabiting these pavilions, built by Chinese artisans. Elsewhere in the Staten Island Botanical Garden, there is a major collection of tree peonies coming into bloom.

2000 Richmond Terrace, Livingston, Staten Island, (718) 272-8200, sibg.org; Grounds open daily dawn to dusk; Scholar's Garden, Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

BROOKLYN BOTANICAL GARDEN

On my early spring walks with Judith D. Zuk, former president of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, she would pause by the pre-



Tulips blooming in the Conservatory Garden in Central Park.

low magnolias, her favorites, on the garden's famous Magnolia Plaza, bearing her name since 2005. At that time the garden also presented her with the newly named cultivar Magnolia July Zuk, a golden yellow with a flash of pink at its base that is in bloom this week, along with other yellow magnolias like Elizabeth, Marilyn and Yel-low Bird.

This weekend the garden celebrates Sakura Matsuri, the Cherry Blossom Festival, on its grand Cherry Esplanade. But perhaps no view equals the serene beauty of a single branch of a weeping cherry seen against the orange torii gate in the Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden, reminiscent of blossoms against the orange woodwork of the Heian Shrine in Kyoto.

1090 Washington Avenue, Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, (718) 423-1208, bbg.org; Tuesdays through Fridays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; weekends and holidays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

JEFFERSON MARKET GARDEN

Greenwich Village is dotted with public squares and community gardens that offer respite in that neighborhood. The Jefferson Market Garden, in the lee of the old Victorian Gothic courthouse, now public library, is a vision both for those who enter and those who walk by its iron fence. With 12 trees, a central oval lawn, a pond and an intricate pattern of walkways, the garden appears more expansive than its one-third acre. The central yellowwood was Andy Warhol's favorite tree, but if you go right now, you'll find a bounty of Spanish bluebells, windflowers, scilla, tulips and daffodils, many as underplannings to blooming magnolias and cherries. Coming soon: crab-apples. A solitary yellow birch or Japanese rose will remain in bloom all summer.

Greenwich Avenue, between Avenue of the Americas and West 10th Street, Greenwich Village, jeffersonmarketgarden.org; Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to sunset.

THE BATTERY

A view over New York's harbor is always refreshing, but particularly at this time of year, from the vantage of the 25-acre Battery. The Bungee Garden, now in its third season, is emerging as a successful and bucolic example of a sustainable landscape. The undulating beds, planted with naturalistic bulbs and perennials, break up the symmetry of the rows of London plane trees. Even this early, magenta primroses, pink and white hyacinths, scilla and Jeffersons are in bloom. By summer's end, some of the beds will grow in six feet tall, strong enough to hold their own against the harbor. This was, after all, the birthplace of New York as, among other things, a garden city.

Southern tip of Manhattan, adjacent to the South Ferry Terminal, thebattery.org; Always open.

ONLINE: IN FULL BLOOM

Additional images of flowering areas mentioned in this article: nytimes.com/arts

Read about Jefferson Market Garden

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