

Missouri Botanical Garden

4344 Shaw Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63110

(314) 577-9400

<http://www.mobot.org>

Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)

Overall Rating: 4.8 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Availability of docent-led tours: 5 stars
- Helpfulness of on-site docents and staff: 4.5 stars
- Ease of visibility of featured attractions: 5 stars
- Tactile and auditory interpretation: 4.5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 28, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Jennifer Smith, Manager of Public Education Programs at the Missouri Botanical Garden, Mr. Donald Frisch, MBG Therapeutic Horticulture Instructor, and Ms. Liz Fathman, MBG Publications Manager.

The Missouri Botanical Garden defies the misconception that flowers, herbs, shrubs, and other plants are only for visual appeal. The Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture programs continue to find new ways that plants can be appreciated through the use of multiple senses. The evolving Zimmerman Sensory Garden, accommodating docents and volunteers, and plans for future enhancements heighten the degree to which blind and visually impaired visitors can learn about and explore our world's diverse plant life.

The Missouri Botanical Garden is very accessible through public transportation. As of June 2014, the Number 14, Number 8, and Number 80 bus routes make regularly-scheduled stops at the Garden's Ridgway Visitor Center's main entrance, at the intersection of Bates and Morganford, and at the intersection of Shaw and Park, respectively. These routes will be directly linked to Metro Link stations and work to maintain the accessibility of the Missouri Botanical Garden via public transportation. As usual, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, local cab companies, and other sighted drivers will be able to easily drop off passengers directly in front of the Ridgway Visitor Center's main entrance. Once inside, the help desk is located directly ahead,

making it a convenient location at which to rendezvous with one's group or at which to solicit assistance in locating the departing station for daily tours.

The tram ride and the complimentary daily tours are both terrific ways to observe and enjoy the key points of interest at the Missouri Botanical Garden. If aware of a visitor's visual impairment, volunteers are careful to add an additional descriptive component to the already informative tours. Customized group tours may also be arranged for a small fee. Please visit the Missouri Botanical Garden's website for further details on regularly-scheduled and specialized group tours. On-site staff members are always eager to help make your visit as enjoyable and illuminating as possible. Visitors will find the Garden's staff extremely helpful and vastly knowledgeable about the peak bloom periods, distinct qualities, and proper method of caring for the wide variety of plant species found at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Furthermore, sight-impaired visitors will find the paths within the gardens easy to follow, while audio cues, such as fountains, provide additional cues for generic orientation.

When visiting the Missouri Botanical Garden, a blind or visually impaired individual should be sure to explore the Zimmerman Sensory Garden, a special garden close to the visitors center in which all the plants are meant to be felt for their unique texture or smelt for their unique fragrance. Fountains and the Solari Bell Tree Sculpture also add a pleasant auditory feature to the atmosphere of the garden. Many horticultural displays are arranged in raised planter beds for easy access and are marked with Braille, raised letter, and large-print name plates. Group tours of this garden are currently available upon request, but a self-guided exploration of the garden, with the assistance of a sighted companion for orientation, is well worth the time of any sight-impaired visitor.

Committed to enhancing the universal accessibility of the grounds, the Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture Programs continue to explore new avenues for heightening a visitor's multi-sensory experience. For example, a tactile map and new entry sign are under current active development in order to improve the means of self-orientation and exploration for both sighted and non-sighted visitors within the Sensory Garden. From a long-term perspective, the Sensory Garden is also being used as a testing ground for making the entirety of the Missouri Botanical Garden more accessible for blind and visually impaired visitors. It is hoped that similar adaptive approaches in the Sensory Garden may gradually be applied and effectively implemented in other areas of the gardens. Garden staff is also considering the creation of a Sensory Tour. This would be a regularly scheduled, more extensive walking tour of the grounds. This would be very similar to the current daily tour, but the guides would rely on the same sensory tactics utilized in the Sensory Garden in how they would engage group members in their horticultural exploration and immersion. Details on further enhancements will be made available as plans progress.

Throughout the remainder of the Garden's extensive grounds, blind and visually impaired visitors can access a growing selection of multi-sensory activities. The Children's Garden offers many multi-sensory experiences from April through October (fees apply for ages 3 to 12). Staffed Germination Stations occur daily on various nature-related topics from 10 a.m. to noon. The Edible Garden offers seasonal tastings on select days of the week. Plan to get wet at the ever-popular splash pad. The Nature Explore Classroom offers a nature art table with natural tactile items and a raised and ground-level sand box. Adjacent to the

Children's Garden is the Brookings Interpretive Center which offers many multi-sensory interactive and hands-on activities. Themes change yearly.

For a light meal, visitors can drop into the Sassafras Café, located in the Ridgway Visitors Center. The way in which the café operates has the potential to be very accommodating for a blind individual. The customer orders from a relatively small menu at the front counter and pays for the meal on the spot. The customer is then given a cup for their drink which they may fill at the drink dispensers which are located on the way to the tables. The customer is also given a card with the number of their order. After the person is seated, the waiter will bring the person his or her meal. By soliciting sighted guide assistance from the café's staff, a blind or visually impaired individual can operate quite efficiently in the restaurant. However, the visitor will need to be able to advocate confidently for him or herself, as there is no Braille or large-print menu, and as the Café's staff may have had minimal experience in previously interacting with blind or visually impaired customers.

For information about the specific gardens within the Missouri Botanical Garden, hours of operation, directions, and special events and exhibits, please visit the Missouri Botanical Garden's website. The information offered on the site is very thorough and informative. Text size may be adjusted using the text-size tool in the homepage's upper right-hand corner. Formatting styles and alternative text for certain links may limit the site's accessibility for Jaws for Windows users. Basic information is still fairly easy to access, but if difficulties arise for Jaws for Windows users, one can always call the main switchboard at the Missouri Botanical Garden to obtain necessary visitor information.

For these and any other questions, please contact one of the following personnel from the Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture Programs.

For any other questions regarding the Missouri Botanical Garden's accessibility, please send inquiries to: accessiblegarden@mobot.org

For questions concerning Therapeutic Horticulture programs or the Zimmerman Sensory Garden, contact Mr. Donald Frisch, Coordinator for Therapeutic Horticulture Programs

Phone: (314) 577-9473, extension 6526

E-mail: Donald.frisch@mobot.org