The Jungle Gardens of Avery Island.

How salt and pepper spice up the natural world.

Much of the world knows about TABASCO® pepper sauce, made for over 185 years on Avery Island, Louisiana. Not as many people know that Avery Island is actually a salt dome that erodes some eight miles beneath the earth's surface. Or that the mysterious "Island" part of the formation rising above the surface is home to one of the world's most beautiful sanctuaries for the preservation and study of flora and fauna.

It was on Avery Island, where salt and pepper meet, that Edward McIlhenny helped save the snowy egret from extinction. In 1895, when the bird was being hunted for its plumage, McIlhenny bought an eyrie on Avery Island, and then captured and raised eight snowy egrets. After they had raised their hatches and were ready to migrate, McIlhenny freed them. The egrets returned the next spring, and every spring since then egrets and herons have returned by the thousands to the rookery now called "Bird City."

For his wildlife conservation efforts alone, "Monsieur Nest," as he was known by his French-speaking friends and associates, would be noteworthy. But he did much more to ensure that future generations had an ideal spot to enjoy and study the beauties of nature and to observe plants and flowers from around the world in his Jungle Gardens.

Jungle Gardens is home to a large collection of camellias. Thousands of plants represent some 300 varieties, including imports from Japan and France, as well as varieties that McIlhenny developed on Avery Island.

The azaleas are also well-represented in Jungle Gardens. Visitors will see thousands of azaleas of many varieties: white, variegated, magenta, pink, red, purple,

Acres upon acres of these bright flowers carpet the landscape in the spring. In every part of the Jungle Gardens landscape, you will find something interesting and different: acres of brilliant wildflowers, trees, groves of evergreens and roads hedged on both sides with English hollies.

And then there's the wildlife. White-tailed deer know they have little to fear and much to eat here. Rabbits hop across roads before visitors' cars while alligators prowl the lagoon and Bayou Petit Arse. Armadillos, possums, squirrels, nutria, raccoons, bobcats and other wildlife may also be glimpsed as you walk or drive the grounds. Not surprisingly, Jungle Gardens is a birders paradise, home to hundreds of species of resident and migratory birds.
The Jungle Gardens layout makes it easy to see and appreciate nature's splendor up close, in an intimate, accessible setting. To that end, paths meander throughout the Gardens, but the best way to appreciate all of the natural diversity and beauty is on foot. Football fields through this 250-acre paradise. Indeed, some of the best sights in Jungle Gardens, like Buddha's Temple, Bird City, and the Palm Garden, are best seen on foot.

Jungle Gardens is open every day of the year. There is an admission charge. We do have Handicap facilities. Please do not feed the animals or pick the flowers.

1. Live Oak Trees
Live oak trees are the prominent trees in the Gardens and provide the setting for plants from all over the world.

2. Marsh Trail
Take a meander through cypress forests and groves of palmettos.

3. Bayou Drive and Long Lagoons
Bayou Petit Anse joins Avery Island by water to the Intracoastal Canal and the Gulf of Mexico. The lagoons are home to the waterfowl imported from South America.

4. Cleveland Oak (known as the Survey Tree)
The live oak was selected on October 9, 1970 by surveyor Thomas Dime to mark a corner of the tract that was to become the first land purchase of the Avery Island family.

5. Buddha's Temple
The Buddha was a gift to E.A. McIlhenny in 1936. Created for the Shinto Temple during the reign of Emperor Hui-Tung some 800 years ago, the statue overlooks a picturesque lagoon.

6. Wisteria Arch
The fragrance and sight of the colorful Wisteria Arch unforgettable. The blossoms range from white at one end to brilliant purple at the opposite.

7. Palm Garden
Located in a grove of trees of the Louisiana palmetto, its native palm. Jungle Gardens' collection of palms include unusual specimens from other parts of the world, as well.

8. Camellia Garden
Jungle Gardens is home to one of the largest collections of Camellias in the nation.

9. Bird City
On the site, "Handeux Neck," first area was built over 100 years ago. Bird City is home to thousands of egrets, herons and other water birds.

10. Timber Bamboo
Imported from China, timber bamboo grows a foot or more a day and in 12 days is fully grown.

11. E.A. McIlhenny's House
Closed to the public.

12. Sunken Gardens
Sunken Gardens offers a tranquil respite during your exploration of Jungle Gardens.

Photography: J. Menu