



# Stonecrop Gardens

by **Ralph J. Ferrusi**



## **Stonecrop Gardens**

63-acre Stonecrop Gardens, “A plant enthusiast’s garden”, “perched in a dramatic setting in the Hudson Highlands, just sixty miles north of New York City”, and a mere five miles up Route 301 from the Hudson’s edge in Cold Spring, are a Jewel, a Visual Feast. The gardens—there was a huge “crop” of stones that had to be cleared to build them, thus “Stonecrop”—were originally the home of Anne and Frank Cabot, became a public garden in 1992 under the direction of Caroline Burgess, and since have become a very significant destination for garden visitors and plant enthusiasts. The 15-acre display gardens, at an altitude of 1,100 feet on the Fahnestock plateau in the eastern Hudson Highlands, have a Zone 6a climate, much cooler and more “weather-beaten” than the valleys below. 40 acres of the garden are protected inside a “New Zealand-style” deer fence.



Zillions of cars roar past the “Stonecrop” sign every day, in what seems to have become in this day and age an almost universal mindless urgency to “get from here to there”. Those lucky (or wise) enough to put on their directionals and scootch up the steep narrow drive will be rewarded, particularly in mid-summer, by a mind-boggling, astounding profusion of COLOR, starting in the big, walled-in Enclosed English-style Flower Garden. And, there’s more: much much more, including, but not inclusive, “A diverse collection of gardens and plants, including woodland and water gardens, a grass garden, raised alpine stone beds, cliff rock gardens, and an enclosed English-style flower garden”.

### The Cabots and Caroline Burgess

In 1958 Garden Conservancy founder Frank Cabot and his wife, Anne built a home on sixty wooded acres high on a rocky, windswept Hudson Highlands hilltop east of Cold Spring. The land was a gift from Anne’s grandmother, Evelina Ball Perkins (hmmmm, the Perkins Memorial Tower and Drive in Bear Mountain/Harriman, the Perkins Trail in Fahnstock???).

Avid collectors of alpine plants—now very much featured in the current garden, indoors and out—their private garden grew over the years, as they dug out rocks and stones and experimented with ideas, horticulture, and, rocks.

In the mid-80’s they decided to share their gardens with the public, and hired horticulturist Caroline Burgess to direct and develop it. An Englishwoman by birth, Caroline arrived in the United States in 1984 as Director of Stonecrop, having completed a three-year diploma in Horticulture at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England.

Her impressive credentials also included working in England for Rosemary Verey at Barnsley House and in the elite horticulture program at the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Kew Gardens, a 330-acre botanical garden in southwest London is one of the city’s top tourist attractions—with 1.35 million visitors a year—and, a World Heritage Site. It was founded in 1840 and houses the “largest and most diverse botanical and mycological collections in the world”.

How about these very impressive figures/statistics: it has a “living collection” of more than 30,000 different kinds of plants. Its herbarium (“a room or building housing a collection of dried plants”), is one of the world’s largest, with an astounding seven million preserved plant specimens. The library has more than 750,000 volumes, with an “illustrations collection” that contains more than 175,000 prints and drawings of plants. The garden has 40 “Grade I or II” listed buildings and structures, “all set in an internationally significant landscape”, including a Conservatory, Orangery, Palm House, Rhizotron (!!!), Pagoda, several temples, a Palace, museums and galleries, and a treetop walkway. And, “one of the largest



The very eye-catching, architecturally-striking 2,000-square-foot mostly-glass Conservatory, overlooking a picture-perfect small pond, is jam-packed year-round with lush, tropical plants (stunning to behold, and “feel” in early April—I’ve been there—after a typically harsh Hudson Valley Winter) and, astonishing to me, also features Mediterranean plants, non-hardy evergreens, an Australian collection, “an extensive succulent collection” and flowering South African bulbs.

The aforementioned English-style Enclosed Flower Garden includes a diverse collection of perennials, and, a central vegetable garden. Behind the Potting Shed are the Alpine, Tropical, and End Houses, and beyond is The Pit House.

Five display greenhouses contain rare plants from all over the world—alpines, tropicals, and succulents—many in bloom, and are also used to over-winter plants that require protection. Don’t miss the Rock Ledge and the Lake below it, and, the mysterious Bamboo Grove.

**A Word of Warning:** be careful—like myself—you may just want to live here...forever.

Stonecrop is open to the public Monday through Saturday, April 1 through October 31, from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Admission is \$10.00 per person for a self-guided tour. A nicely-detailed map and a thorough, very serious plant list is available.

**845-265-2000** [www.stonecrop.org](http://www.stonecrop.org).

**From the Taconic Parkway**, Exit 31B, Route 301 WEST COLD SPRING, west 3.5 miles, big “Stonecrop” sign and main entrance on the right.

**From Route 9**, 301 east 2.7 miles, main entrance/sign on the left.

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compost heaps in Europe”!!!

Rosemary Verey, born Rosemary Isabel Baird Sandilands, “was an internationally known English garden designer, lecturer and prolific garden writer who designed the famous garden at Barnsley House, near Cirencester” in Gloucestershire. In 1939 she married David Verey, whose family owned Barnsley House. Her most famous garden design was that of this house, though she eventually designed gardens for Elton John; Charles, Prince of Wales; the Marquess of Bute; and the New York Botanical Garden. In 1970 she opened the garden for a day to the public, but eventually it was opened six days a week to accommodate its 30,000 annual visitors.

### Back to Stonecrop

In the last several decades, under Caroline’s direction, Stonecrop Gardens has expanded, currently containing “an encyclopedic collection of plants”. A School of Practical Horticulture was established and interns join the garden’s professional staff every year, immersed in priceless hands-in-the-dirt instruction and very serious plant studies.

The acreage includes more than 500 species of Alpine plants. Other highlights include raised alpine stone beds, “systematic order beds” that represent over 50 plant families, and a very large, unique, very cleverly designed (and built) “cliff rock garden” with walking paths leading downhill to a pond and a stone bridge, water bubbling and gurgling from the top all the way down to the pond through some very large—some weighing mega tons—rocks.





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