

# Banner Elk, NC: High Country Getaway

By Beverly Hurley

Another hidden garden gem in Boone is a 26-acre horticultural wonderland, unlike anything you have ever seen. **Arborcrest Gardens** was created by Dr. Ron Stanley and his wife Cheryl as part of their family home site nestled next to Howard's Knob Mountain.



*Arborcrest Gardens / Beverly Hurley*

When Dr. Stanley bought the land in the late 1980s, he put in a veggie garden first even before the house was built. For the next 30 years, he planted everything himself even though he wasn't a formally trained gardener. But then his vision expanded and he hired staff to help him continue building and maintaining this hillside garden delight.

Today, there are over 14,000 cultivars of plants that cascade down the hillsides, fill the valleys, and cover the wetlands of this spectacular garden that includes numerous microclimates in its zone 6 setting.

When you first enter the property, you'll see lovely landscaping surrounding the house and wonder "Is this the garden?" However, the jaw-dropping display unfolds as you stand at the edge of the hill.



*Hillside view at Arborcrest Gardens / Beverly Hurley*

Here, you will see an artist's palette of colors from the trees and shrubs that hug the sides of this 45-degree hill. Yellow, red, orange, and every shade of green are painted before you using conifers, shrubs, and trees. A closer look as you wind down the path reveals mass plantings of perennials and annuals. Instead of planting a few of the same flowers, Dr. Stanley plants flats of the flowers for greater impact. And it works. Your eyes are dazzled by the display.



*Mass plantings at Arborcrest Gardens / Beverly Hurley*

The types of plants seem endless (remember, there are over 14,000 cultivars). Spruce – Serbian, Norway, and blue, kousa dogwood, European larch, Japanese maples, hydrangeas, bald cypress, Franklin trees (*Franklinia alatamaha*), rhododendron and native azaleas, Alaska weeping cedar, ice plants, pitcher plants, variegated cattails, candelabra primroses, peonies, bulbs, 32 different beds of echinacea, and even a hardy banana tree. And this is only a small portion of the plant diversity that you will see at Arborcrest Gardens. Dr. Stanley keeps a spreadsheet of the plants on his website ([arborcrestgardens.org/plants](http://arborcrestgardens.org/plants)) so anyone can check out the specific varieties here.

And that original vegetable garden? It has also grown in size with beds of berries, rows of tomatoes, cabbage, corn, and other edibles to fill wagon loads. The garden donates much of the produce to local organizations.



*The edible garden at Arborcrest Gardens / Beverly Hurley*

Arborcrest is open to the public only on Fridays (no charge), but a **reservation is required**. The network of paths is paved for those who want to meander and enjoy the garden on their own. Five tours are also offered in an electric golf cart on Fridays.