

## Comparison of Visitor Responses at Two Outdoor Settings

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Two year-long visitor studies at major outdoor settings offer insights into the reasons why people choose to visit botanical gardens and arboreturns and what they enjoy once they're there.

The four-season studies were conducted in 1987 at Holden Arboretum, Mentor, OH, and in 1989 at Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe, IL. Since similar tested measures were used in several sections of both questionnaires, it is possible to compare the preferences and activities of these two audiences—one in an exurban area 26 miles northeast of Cleveland and the other in a suburban area north of Chicago and close to Lake Michigan. Both are located in higher income areas, drawing well-educated clientele who evidenced considerable interest in the outdoors but less concern than might have been hoped in some of the programmatic offerings. (The percentages cited below are the averages for all four seasons at each setting.)

In both studies, respondents showed only moderate interest in attending a scheduled program (lecture, class, tour, workshop, demonstration)—31-38% of both audiences said this was a very important/important reason for visiting the site, while 20% at Holden and 33% at CBG found it was not important.

Special events (seasonal shows, plant sales) were more popular drawing cards at Chicago, since 54% of their visitors said these were very important/important reasons for visiting, while one-third of Holden's guests valued them this much. Special events were not important as a reason for visiting for one-quarter of Holden respondents and 17% of CBG visitors. This disparity is explainable when one examines the membership data (57% of the Holden respondents were members of the arboretum and 29% of the CBG guests were members of the botanical garden), since special events are more likely to appeal to nonmembers and occasional visitors.

The reason for low interest in coming to the Chicago garden to provide an outing for children (13% said it was very important as a reason for attendance) is obvious from the demographic data: 77% of the respondents had no persons under 18 years of age living in their households; consequently, 34% of them said that showing the site to children was not an important reason for visiting CBG. At Holden, where 61% of the respondents had no children, 32% said this was a very important reason for attending, and 16% attested it was not important.

Among several reasons for attending that were supported by audiences at both sites were: sharing the experience with other persons, 75% very important/important for both; learning about plants, gardening, landscaping, nature, 65-69% VI/I for both, and showing the site to out-of-town guests, 47-50% VI/I for both.

When asked about participation in eight leisure activities or places, these audiences showed considerable cohesion in their preferences. For instance, 45-48% of both groups photographed outdoors at least three times a year ("frequent" participation in the leisure activity), 66-68% gardened frequently, 67-69% went to museums and historical sites three or more times a year, 75-78% went to outdoor recreation areas (parks, beaches) at least three times a year, and 66-69% visited arboreturns, botanical gardens, or nature preserves frequently.

The Holden folk were more likely to picnic and bird-watch frequently, while the CBG visitors went more often to zoos and aquariums. Both audiences could be classified as "going-out," active people.

Both groups put high store on values expressed in the psychographic measures, such as learning and social interaction. For example, 81-90% of audiences at both places said they strongly agreed/agreed they preferred a leisure place where they could learn in a casual way, sampling activities and programs according to their own interests (33% SA, 57% A at Holden; 22% SA, 60% A at CBG). And, 65-70% of both audiences strongly agreed/agreed that they preferred a leisure activity or place where they could get to know people who have similar interests to their own (17% SA, 53% A at Holden; 16% SA, 49% A at CBG).

Since these data indicate that these audiences are seeking a more casual, social experience than educators might anticipate, educational offerings should include those that are less structured and that promote interaction among guests as well as ones that are more formal and classroom-oriented.

Some of the leisure preferences are related to demographics: 20% of the visitors at both places were aged 18-24 years, 41-47% were 35-54, and 31-38% were 55 and older. Also, 57-60% had earned at least a four-year college degree; an additional 26% at both sites had some post high school education but had not completed a degree—two extraordinarily well-educated audiences.

In both cases, data indicate that audience development efforts might focus on building a younger audience and one at middle educational levels. Since these very well-educated visitors highly valued the more casual, social experience that counts the most with middle and lesser educated publics, there is reason to pursue these avenues, which are the most likely to attract the audiences who are not now participating frequently.