

# Historical Garden in Aalsmeer The Netherlands



## Horticultural museum

[www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl](http://www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl)



## Welcome to the Garden

The Historical Garden museum in Aalsmeer has been in existence for almost 35 years. It is a living monument to how horticulture started in Aalsmeer. The Garden is situated on a unique section of raised land in the centre of Aalsmeer. You will find special collections of horticultural plants that were once grown and traded in Aalsmeer.

The 'Maarse' family, also known as "Dahlia Maarse" were the growers who supported the early-beginnings of the garden and certainly that of the renowned collection of dahlias which the Historical Garden now has. The Garden is also famous for its Lilac, Rose and Clematis collections. There is, at the moment, a selection of more than 1,200 plant species and varieties. It is therefore not surprising that the garden still serves as a gene bank for the current floriculture sector.

We work closely with the 'Old Aalsmeer' foundation, which organises exhibitions about the history of Aalsmeer in its historic town centre. Also the 'Westeinder Rondvaart' (boat trip on the lake), 'Korenmolen De Leeuw' (Wind Mill the Lion) and 'The Bovenlanden' foundation (the Upland areas) are important partners of the Garden. In 'Het Tuinhuis' (The Garden Tea Room) you can relax with a snack and drink and enjoy the atmosphere of the museum garden.

In the Historical Garden you will find the smallest flower auction in the world and discover that buying at our auction is a very special experience.

There is so much more to tell ... In this brochure we will give you a glimpse back in time in local horticultural history.

Enjoy reading about the garden and hope to see you here soon.

*Leo Bertoen*

Chairman of the Aalsmeer Historical Garden Foundation





## The History

Aalsmeer originated in a swampy peat area. It was opened up to the surrounding countryside around the 10th century as the first pioneers must have dug ditches along, what was later to be the Uiterweg and Oosteinderweg. (2 long local roads in Aalsmeer), The dredged soil was tamped between the two ditches. This created a footpath several kilometres in length, which was the beginning of the ribbon roads that are still visible in Aalsmeer today. The oldest document mentioning the name Aalsmeer (then still: "Alsmar") dates from 1133.

The first inhabitants were engaged in agriculture, fishing and cattle breeding. In around 1350 a large number of farmers supplied peat to the count's steward. Less and less land remained, which meant that the remaining land was cultivated much more intensively. This is the reason why tree growing started in the 17th century and in addition strawberry cultivation emerged as a sub and intermediate culture to this.

In around 1880, growers started growing outdoor flowers and in 1896 the first rose greenhouse was built. The peat soil turned out to be fertile soil for flower cultivation. In around 1912 two flower auctions were built in Aalsmeer. From then on the floriculture sector grew explosively.

## A living museum

The Historical Garden is a botanical garden that originated on land owned by growers. The nursery of the Maarse family, nicknamed "Dahlia Maarse", was previously located on these fields. It was the family's wish to give the horticultural history of Aalsmeer a place in history, so the family decided to transfer their land. The Historical Garden Aalsmeer Foundation was established on January 20th, 1978.

*Make a journey  
back in time*

The museum maintains previously grown crops, preserves historically interesting buildings and old cultivation methods and collects objects, tools and materials that have been important in horticulture history. The most important areas are:

- Floriculture
- Fruit and tree cultivation
- Greenhouses and materials
- Roses
- Shrubs for forcing
- Form cultures



Visitors make a journey back in time in the Garden. The museum gives a general survey of horticulture in Aalsmeer from around 1700 to 1940. You will find the cultivation of fruit trees and strawberries in historical order. You will then be introduced to; form cultures, ornamental shrubs, roses, forced shrubs, outdoor flowers and bedding plants. Finally, you can see how the cultivation of cut flowers and pot plants started in frames and greenhouses. The historical development has been arranged in reverse order. You start around 1940 and then go back in history.

## Dutch Association of Botanical Gardens

The Historical Garden is a member of the [Dutch Association of Botanical Gardens](http://www.dutchassociationofbotanicalgardens.nl). Together with around 25 other Dutch gardens, we try to preserve the botanical collection of plants and protect them against extinction. The association works in co-operation with other gardens around the world. The collections of the connected gardens are digitally accessible via this association.

[www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl](http://www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl)



## Museum exhibits of interest

Participating in a real auction, smelling the scent of old rose varieties or discovering what a lean-to greenhouse was first used for? You can learn more by exploring the Garden buildings. Here is a brief introduction.



### EXHIBITION GREENHOUSE

A large number of tools and equipment are exhibited in this former greenhouse. With the help of photographs and artefacts you can form a picture of what and how work was done in the Aalsmeer nurseries in the first half of the 20th century. What is a lilac sledge? What do strawberry cups look like? You will find the answer here.



### AUCTION BUILDING

Since 2000 the Historical Garden has had the smallest flower auction building in the world. A 'jugendstil' auction clock, from the former "Aalsmeer Bloemenlust" flower auction, dating from the nineteen thirties, hangs in this beautiful auction room. The clock still works perfectly and is used during the many public auctions that take place here. Join in and experience the excitement of buying "on the clock". The auctioneer is happy to explain how it works.



*An exciting  
experience: buy  
your own flowers*

## FLORICULTURE GREENHOUSES



After 1850, the cultivation of ornamental crops slowly but surely increased. In the beginning it was mainly shrubs, such as Japanese maple, Deutzia, hawthorn and Laburnum that were grown and forced into bloom. Pot plants such as zonal pelargoniums, primroses and hydrangeas followed later. This trade was difficult to start with. The prices fluctuated too much so people kept searching for other crops. Soon there were cut flowers like stock violas and monthly roses. Planting was done everywhere there was space to plant. In many nurseries, for example, besides corners with cut flowers, you could also come across gherkins and beans.

## LEAN-TO GREENHOUSE

A propagation house, among other things for cuttings, built against the south side of the flower shed. There was a raised frame in the house. Due to this frame and the low-sloping roof, the working space was limited; the propagation house was therefore also called a "creep in". In the winter it was used for pelargoniums.

## FLOWER SHED

Large shed with an earthen floor where numerous activities were carried out, such as sorting and preparing flowers and plants for market, potting and pricking out seedlings. The shed also served as a storage place for tools. The roof-space was used for storing reed mats, sticks and other materials, but also for equipment that was not needed all the year round, such as windbreaks, slides and dredging equipment. The shed in the Garden was built in 1980 in its original style.



## FRAMES

Frames were basically the precursors of the greenhouse. There are different types of frames (flat glass), including a single and a double frame covered with “Aalsmeers windows”. These frames were protected against the frost with reed mats. In the summer, sunlight was blocked with screen mats made from split bamboo. The “wallenbak” (bank frame) is the oldest frame that was used. This is a frame with double walls with soil in between which functioned as insulation.

## BARGE HOUSE

Many growers used to have a simple boat ramp. Here the boats were refurbished and tarred. The canal ditch had bank protection planks which protruded just above the water, so to pull the boat ashore long boards with loose round wooden rollers and a simple winch were used. The barge house was a simple roof structure supported on poles, over the canal ditch.

*Aalsmeer's 'praam' (flatboat) is favourite*

## BOATS

In the wetlands of Aalsmeer much of the transport went by water. Even now plants are still grown on the islands in the Westeinder lakes. The Historical Garden has a collection of boats that were previously in use. The best known boat is the ‘praam’ (flat boat), which was widely used for the transport of plants and soil. The ‘praam’ is still popular in Aalsmeer, because a historic ‘praam’ boat race is held every year on the second Saturday in September. Other boats in the collection include a ‘schietboot’ (long flat bottom boat with sails used for fishing and hunting), a ‘baggerbok’ (dredging boat) and a ‘luikenpraam’ (flatboat with shutters).





### 🏠 COKE SHED

Coke was the fuel used for burning in the greenhouse heaters when forcing lilacs into bloom and for the heating in the rose and other flower greenhouses. The size of the coke shed was based on the fuel stock that a company needed. The coke was delivered by ship and carried into the coke shed either in baskets or by wheelbarrow.

### 🏠 MAT SHED

A shed constructed of wood with a tiled roof. Gaps allow the wind to blow through and help speed up the drying of reed mats, screening mats, fences and poles. The fittings on the doors are original. A low shelter has been built against the shed to help keep wood dry.

### 🏠 CUTFLOWER GREENHOUSE

Greenhouse with a wide assortment of clematis. These were formerly grown as cut flowers. Violets, cluster chrysanthemums and other cut flowers are alternately grown in the soil in this greenhouse.

### 🏠 ROSE GREENHOUSE

The first greenhouse for roses was built in Aalsmeer in 1896 by the Vreeken family on the Uiterweg. Here they grew the Kaiserin Auguste Victoria and Caroline Testout varieties for cut flowers. Other important varieties were Hadley and Columbia. These names can still be found in Aalsmeer street names today. Later, through mutations in the Ophelia variety, several other varieties were created. There are also some cluster roses. This type of rose was grown a lot on top soil.





## WINDOW SHED



A simple structure, constructed from Aalsmeers (frame) windows and intended for the temporary protection of crops against the influences of bad weather. The window shed in the Garden is stronger than the previously used 'barnums'. The name Barnums is derived from the world-famous circus Barnum & Bailey and referred to the rapid manner in which the shed, like a circus tent, could be built and pulled down.



## STOCK SHED

A primitive shed for frost-sensitive crops such as viola (stock) during the winter months. This shed was built by the grower himself from materials that were available: willow poles, alder logs, ash branches, willow peat and reeds. The front is open and faces to the southeast. In winter the open side was closed over with reed mats and the roof was covered with a layer of soil. Greenhouses and sheds made stock sheds no longer necessary: in 1918 the last stock shed in Aalsmeer was demolished.



## SHELTER HUT AND APIARY

A hut to shelter and eat in when working in the field. In many of the huts people found notes about the weather and wind, the type of work being done, etc. In the apiary bees are kept for the pollination of the fruit trees.

## FLOWERING EXHIBITS



The Historical Garden has a large collection of outdoor plants. The many historical varieties not only offer a beautiful sight, they also tell a fascinating story. Here is a short summary.

### 🌸 DAHLIAS

In the greenhouse that once stood on the land that is now the museum, lots of dahlias were grown alongside lilacs and clematis. From August different varieties of dahlias are in flower opposite the rose greenhouses.

### 🌸 OUTDOOR ROSES

First you will see here a few cultivars that were used as outdoor cut roses. The best known is undoubtedly Ulrich Brunner Fils. Also there are monthly roses (Hermosa) and moss-roses. The seed plants at the end of the rose section show some varieties of roses that were used as rootstock. The most important is *Rosa canina*.

### 🌸 BEDDING PLANTS

Gradually floriculture expanded with garden plants. Pelargoniums and especially in the beginning French pelargoniums were followed by hanging pelargoniums and a range of other hybrid varieties and colours. These were mainly grown in frames. The bedding plants familiar today followed, especially marigolds, daisies, violets (including the well-known 'Aalsmeers Giants'), forget-me-nots, hollyhocks and Sweet William.



## ✿ LILACS

The Aalsmeer lilac culture enjoys worldwide fame. Since the end of the 19th century, lilacs have been grown and forced into early bloom. The fertile topsoil is ideal for growing the bushes. The peat soil makes good clod formation possible and promotes rapid re-growth of flowering shrubs forced into early bloom. In the spring, after the bushes have been forced in the greenhouse, they are planted in a field that has been covered over with peat bog from the Westeinder Lakes. This is followed by an intensive programme of physically demanding work for the lilac grower. The bushes are pruned in the winter, thinned out in May and dug around in the soil mid-June to promote flowering. In the autumn, the bushes are taken with a root clod to the nursery, where they are forced into bloom. The cycle is then repeated.

Growing lilacs is a matter of hard work and perseverance. It can take years before a bush has reached its full strength. Once this is the case, flowering branches can be harvested once every two years.



## ✿ FRUIT TREES

The cultivation of fruit trees was the beginning of tree nurseries in Aalsmeer. In the past, people already had orchards around the farms for their own use. The peat skippers from this area were asked questions about fruit trees from their customers. The skippers ordered trees from farmers, who soon realized that more could be earned from this than from livestock farming. As a result, from around 1625 tree cultivation was started as a side business. Until 1900, Aalsmeer was known for its large collection of fruit trees. There were growers who offered 200 apple and 200 pear varieties.



## ❁ TOPIARY TREES

Cultivating trimmed boxwood and Yew figures was very important in Aalsmeer. In around 1880 the fields were full, some trees were up to 25 years old. W. Topsvoort and Terra Nova were two companies that became well known with their 'trimmed trees'. America and England were the main customers. After the First World War, America closed its borders for plants with root/soil clods because they were afraid of diseases that could be transmitted in the soil. England was struggling with an economic crisis. Trade fell drastically and this was the end of the Topiary tree cultivation in Aalsmeer.

## ❁ BERRIES

Red berries were planted along the main path of greenhouses, just for the picking. Black currants were planted along the ditches as it was alleged that the stench of the roots kept the water rats away. You will find a cross-section of former berry varieties in the Historical Garden, including gooseberry, Japanese wine berry, blackberry and raspberry.

## ❁ VEGETABLES

*A well-known Aalsmeers dish is 'Stiense' beans*

The wet soil in Aalsmeer is not very suitable for growing vegetables. However in the past, residents had to grow their own food. In around 1850 people started growing vegetables in the polders in Aalsmeer-Oost, mainly because this was promoted after the reclamation of land from the Haarlemmer lake. Most of the bean varieties you will find in the Garden are varieties that could be grown in wet soil. A well-known Aalsmeers dish is 'Stiense' beans with sweet apples and bacon. These are dried East Indian runner beans. Together with the 'De Oerakker Foundation', the Garden tries to preserve as many old varieties as possible.





## ❁ STRAWBERRIES

Strawberry cultivation is almost as old as the cultivation of fruit and avenue trees. The young fruit trees were planted quite a distance apart. By making use of the land under the trees and growing a ground crop, the land became more productive. Strawberries were the ideal crop for this and grown for a long time in Aalsmeer. The first strawberries were a variety which was derived from the wild strawberry; later better improved varieties were grown. Strawberry cultivation virtually disappeared from the village after 1920.

## ❁ LEAFY PLANTS

Here you will find a cross-selection of previously grown plants. Some plants were cultivated for their leaves and used by florists. Pharmacists used the leaves of the *Prunus laurocerasus* to make laurel water, which was a remedy that helped against anxiety and breathlessness. Ilex (holly), the only evergreen plant that originated in Holland had been cultivated in Aalsmeer for centuries.

## ❁ AVENUE TREES

Initially, avenue trees were sold as 'filler up trees' for the parks around large country houses and castles. Later companies began specializing in specific trees. There was a lot of demand for the various forms of the weeping (hanging) Arbor evergreen tree. Variegated forms were also very popular. The manner in which espalier trees were formed from elm and the linden trees was also a specialized form of cultivation.

## ❁ CONIFERS

In the Garden there is an average assortment of conifers that have been grown in Aalsmeer over the years. In the beginning it was mostly uncultivated varieties which were used to fill up open spaces in the estates. Later varieties were cultivated that could also be used as timber via the forestry industry.

## DISCOVER AND EXPERIENCE



## REVIVING OLD CRAFTS .....

The Historical Garden is a living museum. We want to explain and demonstrate how and why everything grows and flowers. This is why we give regular workshops and demonstrations over rose and fruit tree pruning, oscillating honey, trimming buxus (boxwood) shrubs and hold an information afternoon purely about grafting fuchsia and lilac. We bring old crafts back to life. Curious? Check the [calendar](#) on our website.

## TOGETHER ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

The Historical Garden is also interesting for our young visitors. An ideal trip to learn more about the history of horticulture and Aalsmeer in a fun way.

Thanks to the support of the County of Noord-Holland that helped make all this possible, we have an educational program for primary school pupils (upper classes) and high school students (lower classes) that has been developed in co-operation with The Bovenlanden foundation and the Westeinder Rondvaart.

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The program consists of five parts:

<b>Shortage of land</b>	how Aalsmeer became more than a swamp
<b>The disappearing land</b>	how Aalsmeer lost the reclaimed land
<b>Too much water</b>	over Aalsmeer land and water
<b>From farmer to grower</b>	how Aalsmeer farmers looked for other sources of income
<b>Horticulture</b>	the clever growers of Aalsmeer



Active assignments with a sense of fun in the garden and a boat trip on the lake helps students gain insight in how life was in the past. A teacher's manual is available. For the younger children we have a treasure hunt.

## GUIDEDED TOURS

We have lots of experience with both large and small groups. The enthusiastic volunteers of the Garden are happy to give you a guided tour (request in advance) and tell you all about the horticulture and lives of the growers in the past. Tours are possible in English or German. Prefer to explore the Garden on your own? An individual audio tour guide in several different languages is for hire at the cash desk.

*volunteers tell enthusiastic stories over the life of a grower*

## AUCTIONING

Special auction sessions are possible for groups – a fun and active way to give your group visit an extra dimension. Take a seat in the buyers booth and experience the excitement of skilfully pressing the buttons in order to buy for the cheapest possible price. The auctioneer is happy to explain how the auction system works. There are several [different types of auctions](#).

## BRING THE GARDEN INTO YOUR HOME?

Is it possible to bring produce from the Historic Garden in your own home or garden? Yes: depending on the season, we have various products for sale. Flowers and plants (mostly old varieties) but also organically grown vegetables and fruit, various jams and chutneys, honey from the bee hive, 'Stiense' beans (dried East Indian runner beans) and tubers. Nice for you personally but also as an original gift!

*Original gift: a product from the Historical Garden*

## A WEDDING IN THE GARDEN



The Historical Garden Auction Hall is an approved official wedding location of the Aalsmeer council. A special setting for a special event! It is also possible to arrive or depart by boat (sloop, flatboat) and combine the festivities with exclusive catering from the Garden Tearoom. The auction hall can accommodate up to 55 people.

## FOR HIRE

The auction hall is suitable for (business) presentations and receptions for up to 55 people. Beamer and sound system are provided.

Looking for a special typical Aalsmeer garden location, for a (family) party, a meeting (congress), a reception or an anniversary? Then the Historical Garden is the place. Catering is provided by the caterer in The Garden House (refreshment/tearoom).

## PHOTOSHOOTS

The Garden is an ideal setting not only for individual snapshots, but also for photoshoots and photographic presentations of commercial products. An original location to present a new collection, many a web shop has preceded you. Film producers are also discovering Aalsmeer. The garden regularly forms the green and flowery background of national and international productions. Please contact us to discuss the possibilities.

[www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl](http://www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl)





## REFRESHMENTS

The Garden House Refreshment Room is a cosy and characteristic teahouse, situated by the water at the entrance to the Historical Garden. Open for coffee, pastries, afternoon tea or lunch. You can either sit indoors or outdoors on the attractive terrace. The Refreshment Room uses local produce and products from the Historical garden where possible. Delicious herbs and vegetables, literally everything grown next door. More information:

[www.tuinhuisaalsmeer.nl](http://www.tuinhuisaalsmeer.nl)

## VISIT THE STABLE

In the former stable of Dahlia Maarse's farm, you will find an overall picture of the development of Aalsmeer and Kudelstaart throughout the centuries. This is a permanent exhibition from the Oud Aalsmeer Foundation "Journey through time" and is in combination with theme exhibitions.

A visit to the Historical Centre is included in the entrance fee to the Historical Garden. More information: [www.stichtingoudaalsmeer.nl](http://www.stichtingoudaalsmeer.nl)

[www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl](http://www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl)

## BOAT TRIP ON THE WESTEINDER LAKE

A visit to the garden is only really complete with a delightful boat trip on the "Poel" (lake). The history of Aalsmeer starts around 1100 and the skipper of the Westeinder boat trip starts his story here as the boat departs from the Historical Garden (embarkation point next to the Refreshment Room). What follows is an authentic journey of discovery through narrow channels and wide waters. Enjoy the nature, the water and the wind in your hair in an open boat trip.



*Experience  
traveling by boat  
through the  
narrow channels*

More information: [www.westeinderrondvaart.nl](http://www.westeinderrondvaart.nl)

## FLOWER AUCTION ROYAL FLORAHOLLAND

The Aalsmeer flower auction, Royal FloraHolland, is world famous. Millions of flowers and plants are sold through this auction every day, not only in the auction itself but online. The auction building covers an area of almost 1 million square meters. This makes the auction in Aalsmeer the largest commercial building in the world. In 2016, FloraHollands sales were 4.6 billion euros.

## AALSMEER COMBI-TICKET (OWN TRANSPORT)

*A combi-ticket  
for a complete  
experience*

Make your visit to Aalsmeer more enjoyable with a combi-ticket. For a reduced price it is possible to combine your visit to Royal FloraHolland, the Historical Garden and the Westeinder boat trip. The Aalsmeer Combi-ticket is only available for purchase at the Royal FloraHolland auction building.

For more information and reservations: [www.royalfloraholland.com](http://www.royalfloraholland.com)

[www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl](http://www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl)



## WINDMILL DE LEEUW (THE LION)

The Historical Garden is situated in the centre of Aalsmeer just across from the shopping area. Half way through the main shopping street, Zijdstraat, you will find the corn grinding windmill 'de Leeuw' (the Lion). The windmill is over 150 years old, and has been beautifully restored. It is open to the public on Tuesday and Saturday afternoons. Home products such as flour are for sale.

More information: [www.molendeleeuw.nl](http://www.molendeleeuw.nl)

## A LIVELY GARDEN



In the third weekend of June the garden is one of the main locations of the Aalsmeer Flower Festival and is host to ROOOZ, a beautiful rose exhibition.

During the third weekend of September the Garden plays a significant part in the Aalsmeer Art festival bringing horticulture, nature and art together in a very special way.

In December there is often a Christmas market.

The garden is also involved in local events such as the Pelargonium market (Saturday before Mother's Day) and the Pramenrace (Flat boat race over the Westeinder lake, second Saturday in September).

[www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl](http://www.historischetuinaalsmeer.nl)

## The beginning of a flourishing history

Aalsmeer. A name closely connected with flowers. Not surprising if you consider that Aalsmeer has the largest and most renowned flower auction in the world within its boundaries. Aalsmeer did not become the number 1 flower centre overnight, that took years and even centuries. Relive these old times by visiting the Historical Garden Museum in Aalsmeer.

## Contact

The Historic Garden is open from April until the end of October.

Tuesday to Sunday 10 am - 4.30 pm Closed on Mondays

**For groups:** Please enquire. Exceptions to normal opening hours are possible eg. earlier in the morning or in the beginning of the evening.

For **up-to-date information** regarding opening times, prices, activities, newsletters and reviews, please visit our [website](#).

Holders of a Dutch museum card, sponsors and children under the age of 12 have free access to the Garden.

Museum:	<a href="#">Historical Garden Aalsmeer</a>
Secretariat:	<a href="mailto:coordinator@historischetuinaalsmeer.nl">coordinator@historischetuinaalsmeer.nl</a>
Address:	Praamplein, 1431CV Aalsmeer, The Netherlands
Telephone:	+31(0)297 322562 (extension 2)

## Volunteers

There would not be a horticultural museum if we did not have volunteers. Despite their personal commitment it would be completely impossible for our permanent Staff to do all the work in the Garden. Our volunteers help us with all different types of work from welcoming our visitors at cash desk, giving guided tours, maintaining the garden plants to painting the greenhouses and much more. There is always something to do here in this nice place with its friendly atmosphere. Interested in strengthening our volunteer team? Please contact the secretariat.



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