The Jardin de la Connaissance is a temporary garden conceived for the International Garden Festival at Les Jardins de Métis. It consists of multi-coloured wooden boards, a number of cultivated mushrooms, and some 40,000 books that form walls, benches, and carpets. Based on an open compositional principle, these elements are assembled to create a garden space that is integrated with both the site and structure of the forest.

Celebrating book culture as an ongoing process of shaping, aesthetizing, and distributing information, the Jardin de la Connaissance (Garden of Cognition) does not illustrate the book’s “return to nature” or attempt a bibli-cal readjustment. It does, however, engage with the mythical relation between knowledge and nature integral to the concept of “paradise,” which has been a primary reference for the garden throughout history. The “tree of knowledge” has today become a forest: a plethora of multimedia and an overwhelming world of information. By using books as material in the construction of the garden, we confront these instruments of knowledge with the temporality of nature. Transformation and disintegration destabilize the supposed timeless value of the book.

The composition of the book-volumes is structured with brightly coloured wood plates, which bind the individual stacks together. Over time, the artificial colours of these elements will contrast the greying tones of the exposed paper in the books and the surrounding forest. Overall, the orthogonal organization is reminiscent of a typical Neo-Real composition from the early 20th century, involving an orthographic composition based on “primary” elements. And yet, the “adoption” notion is countered by the gradual decomposition of the paper material. We have tried to implement the concept of transformation as the garden’s primary aesthetic structure. Several varieties of edible mushrooms are cultivated on the books. These accentuate the transformative process of the literarily fixed knowledge, invoking the semantics of cultural and natural wisdom. By visualizing decay as a lifecycle segment, knowledge is exemplified as a process.

The books in the garden are surplus books, supplied by local public libraries and school institutions. There is a wide variety of sizes, formats and genres: from romance novels to religious texts, science to education books, thrillers, and encyclopaedias. Most of the books have been waiting as recycling material in storage spaces in advance of the garden’s second year. The discarded and exposed books remind us of their love with scribbles, tags, and other marks. “Marcel and Amanda,” an aphorism, or “a garden’s particular destiny of time.”

In the garden’s second year the books have grown and mold now invades the cultivated mushrooms. Visitors have emulated themselves and their loves with scribbles, tags, and other marks. “Marcel and Amanda,” an aphorism, or the enthusiasm for a boy-band have been submitted to the garden’s particular destiny of time.