

## INTRODUCTION

As the horticultural epicenter of the United States, Philadelphia and the surrounding towns, suburbs, and countryside are blessed with more public gardens in a concentrated area than almost any other region in the world. Stretching from Trenton, New Jersey, through Philadelphia and down to Newark, Delaware, this area (often called the Delaware Valley) offers more horticultural riches than a visitor could possibly see even in a couple of weeks of hectic garden hopping. *A Guide to the Great Gardens of the Philadelphia Region* offers first-time horticultural visitors detailed coverage of more than 40 public gardens and information about dozens more. The book should also prove enlightening for longtime area residents, who will find new places to visit and new perspectives on old favorites.

We have arranged the book by geographic regions (see the map on the inside front cover) to help readers plan itineraries that include adjacent gardens. We provide estimated visit times

Redbud and quince frame a view of the main house at Winterthur.



to further aid this planning process. Within these geographic sections, we describe the gardens in order of interest to visitors, starting with those we feel have the most to offer. These decisions, made after multiple visits to each garden in 2005 and 2006 by both Adam Levine and Rob Cardillo, are based on variety, size, upkeep and design, the cost of admission, and hours of operation, as well as our intangible feelings upon visiting a place. The point of these “rankings” is to put all the gardens in their proper perspective—something previous garden guidebooks have failed to do—and thereby direct visitors to the gardens that will best satisfy their interests. By listing some of the lesser gardens we hope to bring attention to their condition and needs, and perhaps elicit support from local readers before these places disappear from the horticultural map.

All the gardens and public spaces highlighted here welcome visitors either during regular open hours or by appointment. They range in size from small city lots to estates covering hundreds of acres; in style, from formal to naturalistic; and in age, from less than 10 to more than 250 years old. We focus on ornamental landscapes and gardens because the region has such a wealth of natural areas that they could fill a guidebook on their own.

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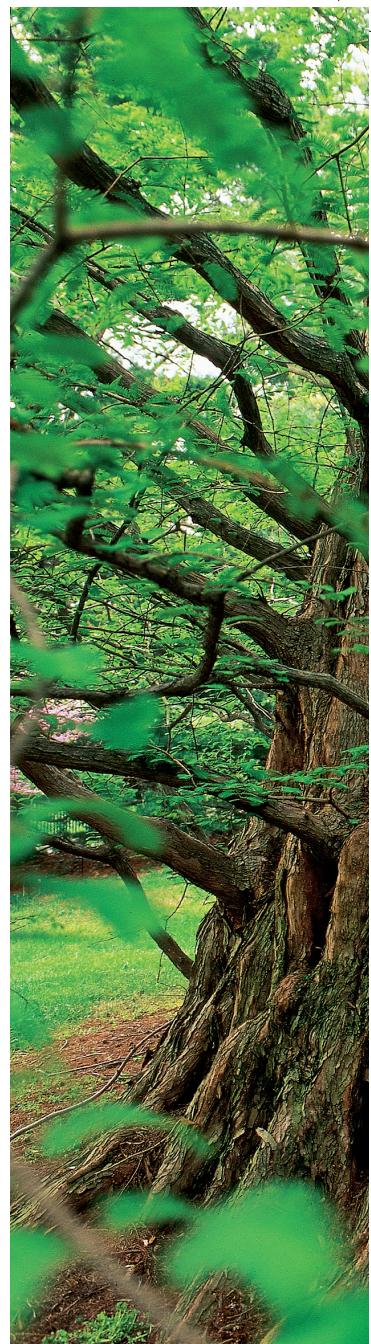
The horticultural richness of the Delaware Valley is due in part to a well-watered climate (in USDA Zones 6 and 7) that has always supported a great diversity of plants. The soil is generally fertile, and the topography of the region extends from the flat coastal plain to the varied hilly terrain of the Piedmont. Many of the region’s most beautiful gardens, often associated with old estates, sit dramatically on those hillsides.

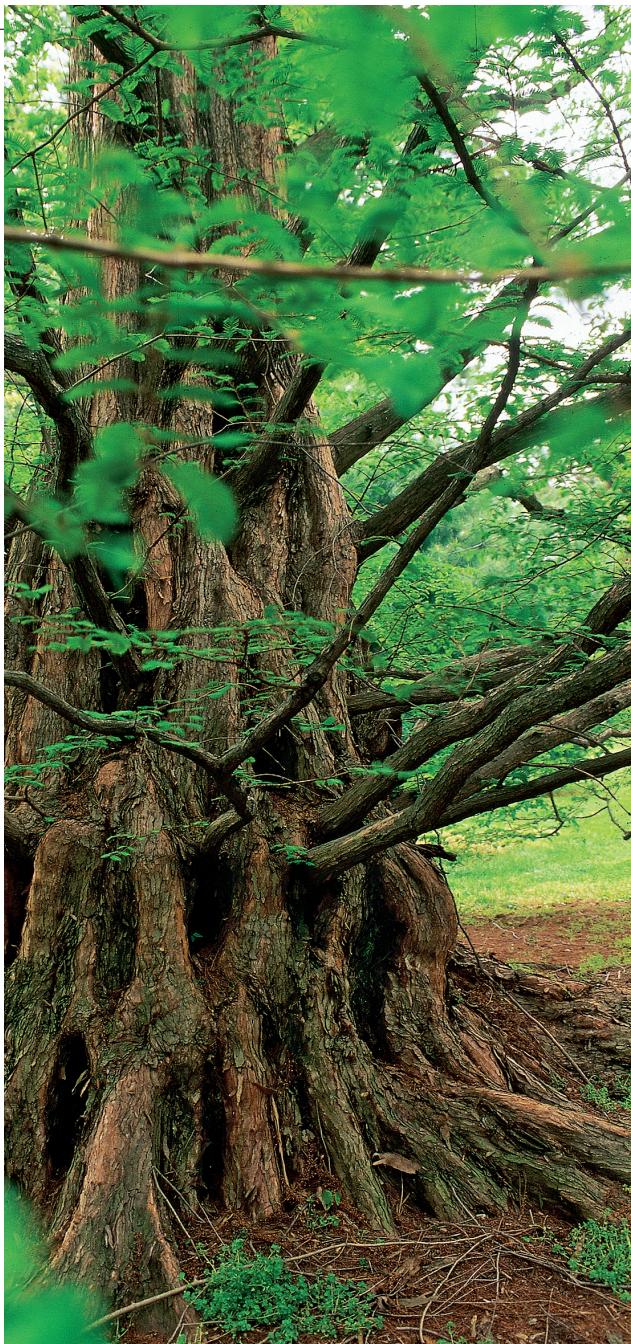
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The long history of gardening in the region reaches back three centuries to the founding of Philadelphia in 1682 by Quaker leader William Penn, who dreamed of creating a “green country town” where every home would be surrounded by a garden and orchard. As the city grew and became more densely settled, property became more and more valuable and the original large lots were subdivided into tiny rectangles with little room for greenery of any kind. Residents with sufficient means escaped the crowding and unhealthiness of the city, building summer places in the surrounding countryside where ornamental gardening flourished. While a number of beautiful houses remain from this pre-Revolutionary period, only Wyck and Bartram’s Garden have been able to devote significant resources to maintaining their historical landscapes.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, as Philadelphia grew into a major commercial and industrial center, wealthy merchant, banking, and manufacturing families built elaborate mansions outside Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware. Many of these estates rivaled English country houses in their expanse and grandeur, and they were ornamented with beautiful landscaping influenced by designs from around the world. Among the gardens from this era that are now open to the public are Andalusia, home of the Biddle family for more than 200 years; Compton, created by two Morris siblings and now called the Morris Arboretum; and Chanticleer, created by the Rosengartens, whose family chemical firm merged with Merck in the 1920s to form the largest pharmaceutical company in the world.

The gunpowder works built by E. I. du Pont in 1802 along Brandywine Creek funded the cre-





The ribbed trunk of a stately dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) at Longwood Gardens.

ation of a horticultural empire that flourishes to this day. Du Pont family members continue to create magnificent private gardens in the Brandywine Valley, and the gardens founded by their forebears—including Longwood, Mt. Cuba, Winterthur, and Nemours—rank among the best public gardens in the country.

Though these estate gardens have many historical components and a few (such as Gibraltar) are accurate restorations of original designs, others have continued to evolve and change since they opened to the public. The horticulture at Chanticleer is particularly dynamic, and, like a number of the gardens described here, it is worth visiting again and again, even in a single season.

The Delaware Valley's tradition of botanical learning dates back at least to Benjamin Franklin's founding of the American Philosophical Society in 1743. The society promoted and published inquiries into a wide range of subjects, including horticulture and agriculture. John Bartram, an early member, was the best known of a group of colonial botanists in

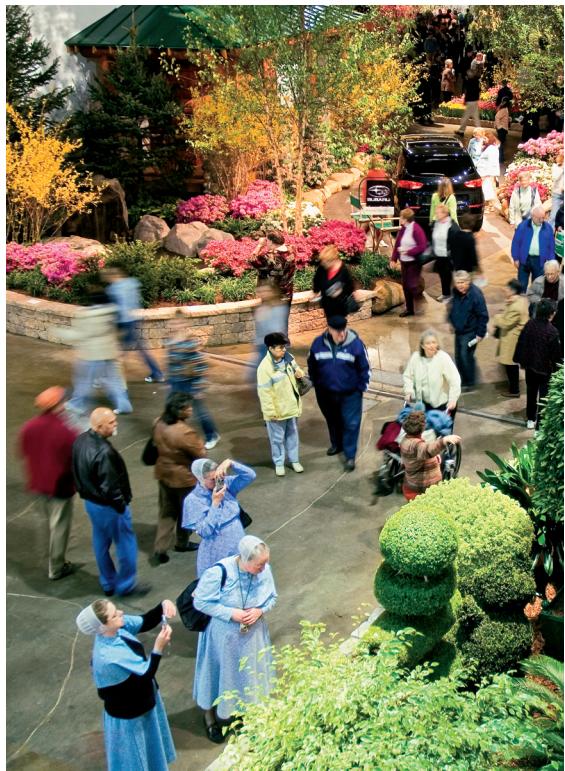
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Philadelphia who created extensive gardens with plants gathered from their own explorations and exchanged with other collectors in the colonies and in Europe.

Horticulture and commerce came together here in the late 18th century through the efforts of the first seed merchants in America—Landroth, Buist, Dreer, and others whose names are familiar to many gardeners today.

The 1803–1806 expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to the newly purchased Louisiana Territory began in Philadelphia, and the plant specimens they collected are still housed in the city's Academy of Natural Sciences. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), founded in 1827, promoted discourse on horticultural topics among its members and, through annual exhibitions that began in 1829, among the general public as well. During its long history, PHS has had an incalculable and continuing impact on the horticulture of the region, most recently through its pioneering work in community gardening and greening projects and its efforts to improve many of Philadelphia's parks and public spaces.

Today, colleges, universities, and trade schools in the region offer formal programs in landscape design and ornamental horticulture, including Philadelphia's W. B. Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences. The larger public gardens and arboreta offer training and internships that attract applicants from around



The Horticourt at the Philadelphia Flower Show. Held each March, the show marks the start of the gardening year and serves as a showcase and unofficial annual convention for plant enthusiasts from across the region.



the world. Many national plant societies have chapters here, providing opportunities to learn about particular plants and gardening styles, including African violets, bonsai, chrysanthemums, cacti and succulents, daffodils, dahlias, daylilies, hardy plants, herbs, irises, roses, rhododendrons, rock gardening, and more. Scores of garden clubs hold regular meetings and lectures, and among their thousands of members are many who serve the public gardens as board members and volunteers. The public gardens themselves offer so many courses, conferences, lectures, tours, and other programs that it is safe to say that on almost any day of the year, especially during the peak gardening months from March through October, there is at least one educational program underway somewhere in the region. For upcoming events see [www.greaterphiladelphiagardens.org](http://www.greaterphiladelphiagardens.org) and "The Wired Gardener," a monthly electronic newsletter produced by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and available at [www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/garden/wired.html](http://www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/garden/wired.html). The online editions of local newspapers often include gardening events in their weekly "Home" sections. In the *Philadelphia Inquirer* ([www.philly.com](http://www.philly.com)), the "Home and Design" section, with several garden-related articles, appears on Friday.

For visitors as well as longtime residents, tapping into this "horticultural intelligentsia" will repay the effort many times over. Beyond the region's beautiful gardens, these programs provide opportunities to learn from and hobnob with some of the country's best gardeners, the folks who make this region a mecca for garden-lovers from all over the world.

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