ARS 2019: The Philadelphia Story
Sunday Self-Guided Tours of Private Gardens and More

After the conference concludes late Sunday morning, May 19, there are many options for attendees to extend their exploration of the Philadelphia area that afternoon.

It goes without saying that Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell and so much more from the founding days of the republic are a worthy destination, all in a concentrated area of central Philadelphia. We cannot begin to describe the possibilities, and thus refer you to nps.gov/independence, website of Independence National Historic Park.

People who arrive at the convention Wednesday or Thursday may wish to visit the public gardens on the early tours. A writeup about each may be found here: ars2019.org/tours. You should Google-search each institution to ascertain hours, admission fees, and GPS directions.

Several Philadelphia-area ARS members and friends have agreed to open their gardens Sunday afternoon starting at 1 p.m. And there are additional public gardens that merit your interest. They are being grouped geographically here, in recognition that convention attendees may add them to their drive home. The public gardens have varying hours and most have admission fees; a link is provided for each so you can plan. Please note that the private gardens listed below are open Sunday afternoon only, 1 – 6 p.m. * indicates an admission fee.

South of the Desmond, not too far

In the charming college town of Swarthmore, the renowned private garden of Charles Cresson, Hedgeleigh Spring, will be open for ARS members. Charles’ grandfather began the garden. Trained at Wisley in England, Charles has perfected the design and filled the highly curated space with rarities from around the world. The phrase “garden gem” is overused, but it truly applies to this garden.

32 Amherst Ave., Swarthmore, PA 19081

The entire campus of Swarthmore College has been planted as the Arthur Hoyt Scott Arboretum, and the collection of mature, significant woody plants is remarkable. There are maps throughout the campus; do not skip the amphitheater on the western edge of the campus.

500 College Ave., Swarthmore, PA 19081; scottarboretum.org

Swarthmore is about 20 miles from the Desmond via U.S. Route 30 and I-476 (Route 30, or Lancaster Avenue, is a busy business corridor). GPS may direct you via other, technically shorter routes.

South, toward and into Delaware

Jim Gears’ garden and nursery may be only an acre and a quarter, but there is so much to see, especially at ground level, that a visitor needs to take some time. No vistas here, but
meandering paths through a mature woodland garden featuring rhododendrons, evergreen and deciduous azaleas, and numerous wildflowers at the edges of the paths. The nursery will be open for sales.

2065 Parkerville Rd., West Chester, Pa. 19382; 610-793-2313 (about 17 miles from the Desmond, via Routes 202 and 926)

The art of the famed Wyeth clan is based in the Brandywine River Valley just north of the Pennsylvania-Delaware border. The Brandywine River Museum * holds extensive collections. The temporary exhibit American Beauty, featuring significant 19th-century landscapes and American impressionists, is on view in May.

1 Hoffmans Mill Rd, Chadds Ford, PA 19317; brandywine.org (about 18 miles from the Desmond via Route 202 and Route 1).

Two monumental estate gardens of du Pont heritage are in northern Delaware, though these two emphasize house over garden. Nemours * is the former estate Alfred I. du Pont. The turn-of-the-previous-century mansion, with 75 rooms, mimics a French chateau, and has the largest formal French garden in North America.

850 Alapocas Dr., Wilmington, DE 19803; nemoursmansion.org

Hagley Museum & Library * is where the du Pont fortune began. The museum has exhibits on the pre-industrial gunpowder industry, and the 1803 house and the first du Pont botanical garden are also tourable.

200 Hagley Creek Rd., Wilmington, DE 19807; hagley.org

Nemours and Hagley are near each other, off Route 141 in Delaware. About 25 miles from the Desmond via Route 202.

Shoppers’ alert: Terrain, an alluring, sophisticated garden center and home/garden design emporium, plus a garden cafe, is in the vicinity of the above gardens: 914 Baltimore Pike, Glen Mills, PA 19342; 610-459-2400; shopterrain.com/glen-mills.

Philadelphia, east from the Desmond

In Philadelphia are several treasures, plus the private garden of Michael Martin Mills, the rhododendron registrar for North America. These are organized from southwest Philadelphia to the northwest section of the city:

Bartram’s Garden * is a truly special site with a critical horticultural history. This is the oldest botanical garden in North America, begun in 1728. Bartram collected plants from New York to Georgia, sending seeds and propagations to England, including Rhododendron maximum and native azaleas. He discovered Frankinia alatamaha and saved it from extinction. Amazingly, the garden survived as the industrial age surrounded it.

5400 Lindbergh Blvd, Philadelphia, PA 19143; bartramsgarden.org from the Desmond, about 28 miles, via I-76). The last portion of the route to Bartram’s is a challenge, but the reward is worth it. GPS is all but essential.

The Barnes Foundation Arboretum * is the lesser-known legacy of Laura and Albert Barnes, known principally for their flabbergasting art collection. The art has been reinstalled in central Philadelphia, but Laura Barnes’ arboretum flourishes in Merion, a block over the city line. Its 12 acres include significant specimen trees and highly refined herbaceous collections.
300 N. Latch’s Lane in Merion, PA 19066; 215-278-7350; barnesfoundation.org/whats-on/arboretum (from the Desmond, about 24 miles, via I-76; from Bartram’s Garden, about 7 miles via West Philadelphia neighborhood streets, or 10 miles via I-76 and Route 1)

**Michael Martin Mills** and his late husband Randy Dalton (a grandnephew of Joseph Gable) began their garden in 1985 on a largely “blank canvas” yard, expanding it 20 years later with adjoining property. Rhododendrons and azaleas abound, along with choice woodland perennials and various woodies.

632 Burnham Road, Philadelphia, PA 19119; 215-527-7145 (from the Desmond, about 22 miles via I-76 and Lincoln Drive; from the Barnes Arboretum, about 6 miles, via City Avenue/Route 1 and Lincoln Drive)

**Southwest of the Desmond**

**Sherwood’s Forest** is the nursery and home of Evelyn Gondek, in the rural southwest corner of Chester County, PA, not far from the Maryland line. Her father, Gerhard Hansen, began the nursery in 1991, and a grove of mature rhododendrons reflects his refined style of plant collecting. There are many other mature woodies and trees among the nursery specimens.

25 Camp Road, Nottingham, Pa. 19362; 484-995-6017 (about 45 miles from the Desmond, via Route 202 and Route 1).

**North and northeast of the Desmond**

In Bucks County, northeast of Philadelphia, **Hortulus Farm** * is an opulent garden created and maintained by garden designer Renny Reynolds and garden author Jack Staub. The 100-acre establishment has 18th- and 19th-century buildings surrounded by horticultural sumptuousness. (It’s a good idea to peruse the website in advance of visiting.)

60 Thompson Mill Road, Wrightstown, PA 18940; 215-598-0550; hortulusfarm.com (about 40 miles from the Desmond, via I-76 and I-276, then local roads).

Two private gardens in Bethlehem, Pa., are open to ARS members on Sunday. **Dale Howe**, president of the Lehigh Valley ARS Chapter, has been developing his three-acre garden for 20 years. It has been likened to a mini-arboretum, with terraces, garden rooms and a pond. In addition to well over 200 rhododendrons, there are many specimen trees, including Japanese maples, magnolias and conifers. (Dale suggests calling beforehand, though it’s not required.)

5565 Landis Mill Rd., Bethlehem, Pa., 18015; 484-515-1094.

Hybridizer **Tom Ahern** has spent 30 years creating his garden. Thus, it is a mature rhododendron collection – to which he’s always adding something new. About a third of the rhododendrons in the garden are his crosses, but the newest section is all Ahern hybrids. Weather permitting, the outdoor display on May 19 will include many of Tom’s exquisite bird carvings.

1360 Puggy Lane, Bethlehem, PA 18015; 610-868-5840 (where Puggy Lane dead ends, the Ahern driveway begins).

**The Ahern and Howe gardens are 10 minutes apart, straddling Interstate 78, about 50 miles north of the Desmond, via I-76, I-476 and Route 309.**

* – indicates an admission fee.