

## RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS

Explore Sites That Participate in the AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program

### Pittsburgh Botanic Garden

by Charlene Chuquillanqui

**N**ESTLED WITHIN 460 acres in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden (PBG). The garden, which opened on a permanent basis in 2015, is a relatively new addition to the Pittsburgh area but has already proven to be a valuable gem for the community.

While only 60 acres of the extensive property have been developed so far, the garden offers a range of serene garden areas, three miles of wooded trails, family-fun exploration stations, and a restored historic homestead that visitors of all ages enjoy. With 400 more acres to transform, PBG will continue to become “a special place of beauty for the community to connect with native plants and experience nature,” says Keith Kaiser, PBG’s executive director.

#### REVITALIZING THE LAND

The garden itself may be newly opened, but the vision for PBG sprouted decades ago. In 1988, a group of local horticulturists and green industry members came together with a desire for Pittsburgh to have an outdoor public garden. Their collaborative efforts in the 1980s eventually led to the leasing of 460 acres of abandoned coalmine land from Allegheny County. Before the vision of the garden could become a reality, however, strong reclamation efforts were needed to restore the bleak acreage left from western Pennsylvania’s industrial past. With unrelenting determination, the work to revitalize the land and restore it to its pre-industrial splendor was set in motion.

Most notable is the transformation of the lotus pond located in the garden’s **Asian Woodlands**. When the property was acquired, the pond was a dreary, highly acidic body of water contaminated by coalmine drainage. Following the implementation of an innovative water treatment system, the



For years, acid residue flowing from nearby abandoned mines left this pond lifeless. Today, the restored lotus pond is full of aquatic plants and wildlife and is a popular destination for visitors.

pond is now teeming with a freshwater ecosystem of water lilies, insects, fish, and frogs. Ongoing work to create new gardens and restore degraded woodlands and water ecosystems remains an important objective for PBG.



Constructed in the 1780s, the Walker-Ewing-Glass log house, the former home of a pioneer family, now serves as an educational space.

#### PROMOTING VISITATION

In addition to its focus on the environmental remediation of the land, PBG is strongly committed to providing a space for all visitors to enjoy. “As one of many places in the Pittsburgh region where individuals choose to spend their free time, we strive to connect with the local and regional residents, including tourists, to our region,” says Beth Exton, development director. In addition to the crowd-favorite lotus pond, the **Margaret Lawrence Simon Dogwood Meadow** is also a signature garden spot. This eight-acre meadow features an impressive stand of native flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*). When the trees bloom in April and early May, visitors enjoy the spectacle of what Kaiser describes as “a big white cloud that landed on the landscape.”

Visitors can explore the roots of the region and learn about pioneer life in

## Additional Information

### Pittsburgh Botanic Garden

799 Pinkerton Run Road  
Oakdale, PA 15071  
(412) 444-4464  
[www.pittsburghbotanicgarden.org](http://www.pittsburghbotanicgarden.org)

- Hours: **Apr.–Oct.:** Tues.: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Wed. & Thurs.: 9 a.m.–7 p.m.; Fri.–Sun.: 9 a.m.–5 p.m. **Nov.–Mar.:** Tues.–Sun.: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
- Admission: Members: free; see website for regular and special admission pricing.
- RAP benefits: Free admission; special discounts for educational programs and select special events

the Allegheny Plateau at the garden's restored **Heritage Homestead**—featuring a historic log house, a heritage apple orchard, pioneer garden, and chicken coop. The garden's event center—a renovated 1870s barn—also serves as a symbol of the land's agrarian past. Additionally, seasonal events such as Dogwood Days and Autumn in the Garden, as well as educational programs for all ages, help foster an appreciation of the



Near the entrance of PBG, visitors can stroll through the Peirce Family Celebration Garden, which features an ornate iron gazebo surrounded here in spring by tulips.

## HOW THE RECIPROCAL ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (RAP) WORKS

This American Horticultural Society program is designed to encourage people to visit gardens, arboreta, and conservatories while traveling. As a current member, you receive free admission and/or other special discounts at more than 330 sites throughout North America! Here's how to make the most of this member benefit:

- View the current list of participating locations and the RAP benefits they offer at [www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens](http://www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens). This list is also published in a booklet. To order, visit <https://www.ahsgardening.org/gardening-programs/rap>.
- Contact the garden to confirm the RAP benefits it offers. (Some sites may choose to enforce a 90-mile exclusion policy; if your zip code falls within that distance from the location, you would not receive the offered RAP benefits there.) Admission to special events may also be excluded.
- Present your current membership card at the admissions counter or gift shop to receive the RAP benefit(s) offered by that garden. Each card will only admit the individual(s) listed on the card. In the case of a family, couple, or household membership card that does not list individual names, the garden must extend the benefit(s) to at least two members; it is at the garden's discretion to extend benefits to more than two individuals. Some gardens may require a photo ID.

outdoors. Nature Passport, a hands-on children's garden activity, and a year-round Yoga in the Garden Series for adults are just a few of many offerings.

### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

With the success of the 60-acre wood-

lands, PBG is excited to continue converting its remaining 400 acres into an idyllic place of thriving beauty and environmental stewardship. According to Kaiser, the most remarkable aspect of the garden is “the transformation of the land from its former state to what it is becoming.” New additions like the **Hillside Pollinator Garden**, which opened in 2019, teach visitors about native plants of the region and how to provide a nourishing habitat for pollinators.

This year, PBG will also unveil new garden areas that continue to strengthen the garden's mission. The 2020 additions—a new **Welcome Center, Auto Garden, and Garden of the Five Senses**—will enhance the visitor experience and connect people of all abilities with plants. In particular, the Garden of the Five Senses will be a sensory garden boasting interactive features. “The idea for this garden stemmed from the need to provide an outdoor learning/play space accessible for all ages and abilities,” says Exton. “When this garden opens Mother's Day weekend, visitors including families, caregivers, and special needs individuals will feel welcome.” In time, the garden hopes to “serve as one of the premiere public gardens where the beauty and knowledge of our collection of plants from the Allegheny Plateau are shared with the public.”

*Charlene Chuquillanqui is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.*