Key Events in AHS History (1922-2022)

● 1922: **American Horticultural Society** (AHS) and **National Horticultural Society** (NHS) founded in Washington, D.C., and Henning, Minnesota, respectively. The first edition of **The National Horticultural Magazine** was published in August.

● 1924: The AHS debuts an **Annual Spring Flower Exhibition** in Washington, D.C. This show continues until 1930.

● 1926: AHS and NHS merge, retaining the name American Horticultural Society with headquarters in Washington, D.C. **Furman L. Mulford** elected president. **Benjamin Yoe Morrison** took over responsibility for editing the magazine. Membership was around 1,000.

● 1932: AHS is incorporated in Washington, D.C. The AHS headquarters moved to the **Washington Loan and Trust Building** in 1934.

● 1938: The AHS institutes a **Silver Medal**, presented at flower shows—this is a precursor to the current **AHS Environmental Award**, which is given at several regional flower shows.

● 1942: The AHS and the **Royal Horticultural Society** jointly publish a **Daffodil Year Book**—this stemmed from the work of the Society’s Narcissus and Tulip committee, which had been publishing yearbooks from 1935 to 1938 in cooperation with the **American Daffodil Society**.

● 1946: The first **American Horticultural Congress**—a precursor to AHS’s annual conference—was held in Cleveland, Ohio. This meeting also launched “United Horticulture” which came to fruition under the auspices of the **American Horticultural Council** (AHC), a group affiliated with the AHS. The keynote address was delivered by renowned Cornell University horticulturist **Liberty Hyde Bailey**.

● 1953: First **International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants** published through the efforts of the AHC.

● 1953: Creation of the AHS’s **National Award Program**, which is now called the **Great American Gardeners Awards**. Four awards were given in this inaugural year: Horticultural Writing, Professional Award, Teaching Award, and Scientific Award.

● 1958: AHS sponsors publication of **The Azalea Book, by Frederic P. Lee**—this is one of the earliest manifestations of the Society’s book publishing program. In 1962, AHS also published **The Peonies**, edited by **John C. Wister**, a legendary
horticulturist who was the first director of the Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

- **1958:** The first **Liberty Hyde Bailey Medal** is awarded to **John Wister** by the AHC. This award was integrated into the AHS’s Great American Gardeners Awards program and is now considered the Society’s most prestigious honor, given for lifetime achievements in horticulture.

- **1959:** The first (and so far only) **AHS Gold Medals** were presented to **B.Y. Morrison and Frederic P. Lee** during the Society’s annual meeting at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.

- **1959:** AHS institutes a seed distribution for members. This eventually evolved into what was known as the **Annual Seed Exchange**, which continued until 2016. (An interesting historic note is that in the early 1970s, the **Morton Arboretum** in Illinois was coordinating the seed distribution for AHS).

- **1960:** AHS and the American Horticultural Council merge—the publication name changes to the **American Horticultural Magazine**. Membership goes over 5,000 for the first time.

- **1960:** The AHS and the AHC cooperate in developing the first version of the **USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map**.

- **1960:** The AHS becomes the distributor of the **Nickerson Color Fan**, an early version of the color wheels used in horticulture and floriculture today. The printed chart was funded by a grant from the **Longwood Gardens Foundation**.

- **1964:** **B.Y. Morrison** retires after 37 years as magazine editor along with a stint as AHS President. He died two years later at his home in Mississippi.

1965: AHS becomes co-sponsor of the **Colonial Williamsburg Garden Symposium (CWGS)** in its 19th year. This partnership is still in place, and in 2022 the CWGS celebrates its 75th anniversary.

- **1967:** AHS relocates its headquarters to **Calvert House** in Washington, D.C.

- **1968:** The **AHS Plant Records Center** is founded at the **Tyler Arboretum** in Lima, Pennsylvania. Funded by the Longwood Foundation, the project was the first attempt to computerize plant records for major American arboreta and botanic gardens.

- **1969:** An AHS **Gardener’s Information Service** is set up to answer horticultural questions from members.
• 1971: AHS relocates its headquarters to a high-rise building in Alexandria, Virginia.

• 1971: AHS receives a $29,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to develop a manual illustrating how to select appropriate plants for highway projects.


• 1972: AHS’s magazine is renamed American Horticulturist and redesigned to look less like a professional journal and more like a popular gardening magazine.

• 1973: AHS purchases River Farm as its headquarters through the generosity of philanthropist Enid A. Haupt. The official opening ceremonies are held on May 1, 1974, with First Lady Patricia Nixon and Haupt in attendance.

• 1974: AHS launches American Diploma in Horticulture program, providing certification to people with demonstrated skill and experience in practical horticulture.

• 1976: A new AHS Medal is established to recognize horticultural excellence at regional flower shows (bronze, silver, and gold categories).

• 1978: J. Benjamin Williams designs a rose garden at River Farm. The garden, along with many trees, is badly damaged by Hurricane David the following year, but later replanted.

• 1979: With the ending of a 10-year grant from the Longwood Foundation, the AHS Plant Sciences Data Center shifts from database management to producing aluminum plant labels and membership mailing lists. Also publishes second edition of "Master Inventory of Botanical Taxa," containing over 173,000 plants at 42 botanical gardens.

• 1980: River Farm is approved as an All-America Selections official display garden. The American Dahlia Society establishes a trial garden at River Farm.

• 1981: A children’s garden is established at River Farm based on an idea proposed and supported by Board member Julia Rappaport.

• 1982: Publication of the AHS Illustrated Encyclopedia of Gardening. This 21-volume series focused on topics ranging from houseplants to fruits and berries, pruning, and landscape design.
• 1983: The AHS Horticultural Intern program is launched.

• 1987: Carolyn Marsh Lindsay becomes the first woman president of AHS.

• 1990: Development of Compost Park at River Farm.


• 1991: AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program, which offers AHS members free or discount admission to public gardens around North America, is introduced as a new member benefit.

• 1993: AHS hosts the first Children’s Gardening Symposium (later renamed the National Children & Youth Garden Symposium), held in Chevy Chase, Maryland. The symposium was organized by AHS Education Coordinator Maureen Heffernan, and sponsored by the W. Atlee Burpee Company. A series of designed children’s gardens is created at River Farm.


• 1996: AHS’s official publication changes name to The American Gardener. With assimilation of the newsletter, the magazine is now published bimonthly. First issue with new name is May/June 1996.

• 1997: In celebration of the Society’s 75th anniversary, announcement of 75 Great American Garden Books, 75 Great Plants for American Gardens. Launch of the AHS Book Award program.

• 1997: Introduction of the AHS Plant Heat Zone Map, developed by AHS President Dr. H. Marc Cathey.


• 1998: Launch of the initial AHS website.

• 1999: River Farm is used as a location for filming scenes from the movie “Rules of Engagement,” starring Samuel L. Jackson and Tommy Lee Jones.

• 2000: Launch of the AHS SMARTGARDEN™ program developed by Dr. Cathey, who lectures on the program at venues around the country. The program spawns an online course (see HGI, below), a book series, and even a television series called Smart Gardening TV.
2002-2003: AHS, under contract to the USDA, coordinates update of the **USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map**. In 2003, the USDA rejects the draft map and hires new consultants to complete the project.

2003: Launch of **The Growing Connection** program with the United Nation’s FAO and EarthBox. Creation of Growing Connection demonstration area at River Farm. (see article in Jan/Feb 2003 issue of TAG)

2003: In cooperation with the **Horticulture Gardening Institute at Michigan State University**, the AHS launches gardening classes that are a hybrid of online and in person sessions. Initial class on containers is succeeded by program based around SMARTGARDEN concept. (See Jul/Aug 2003 issue of TAG)

2003-2004: Publication of four **AHS SmartGarden Regional Guides** by DK Publishing.

2004: AHS Board of Directors approves new conceptual **Master Plan** for River Farm. The plan was created by landscape architecture firm, Marshall, Tyler, Rausch.

2004: **AHS Garden Schools** launched—these educational programs presented by leading horticulturists traveled around the country until 2009. Topics covered included garden design, color, native plants, evening gardens, and garden photography.

2004: First section of the **André Bluemel Meadow** planted at River Farm.

2004: Discovery of a set of former **White House gates** at River Farm by Board member and architectural historian **William Seale**. Donations secured to have the gates professionally restored.

2004: AHS headquarters at River Farm officially designated a **Horticultural Landmark** by the **American Society for Horticultural Science**.

2005: River Farm is selected as a host site for the **Eastern Performance Trials**, a plant industry showcase. The event was renamed **Fashion in Bloom** in 2006 and 2007.

2005: The AHS partners with the **Junior Master Gardener** organization on **Growing Good Kids—Excellence in Children’s Literature** awards, an annual award program honoring children’s books that are especially effective at promoting an understanding of and appreciation for gardening and the natural world.
•2005: AHS’s restored **White House gates** are used in the entrance display to the **Philadelphia Flower Show**.

•2006: AHS **Green Garage® exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower Show** wins Best of Show in Educational exhibits and a Special Achievement Award.

•2007: AHS **Green Garage® exhibit** featured at the **Northwest Flower & Garden Show** in Seattle, Washington.

•2007: AHS launches online educational webinar series with Allan Armitage as initial guest host. This series continued intermittently through 2010.

•2009: Publication of the **AHS New Encyclopedia of Gardening Techniques** by Mitchell Beazley/Octopus publishers (a softcover edition was released in 2013).


•2010: Digital edition of **The American Gardener** published for the first time with July/August issue.

•2010: **Jane L. Taylor Collection** of children’s gardening and nature books is added to the AHS Library.

•2012: Ground breaking for **AHS Infrastructure Project**, which included upgrades to River Farm’s water, septic, and communications systems. The work was funded by donations and a $1 million loan.

•2013: The AHS receives the **Award of Excellence** from the **National Garden Clubs, Inc.**

•2013: AHS unveils major redesign of website.

•2017: AHS hosts **National Pollinator Garden Network** meeting at River Farm.

•2020: Board of Directors approves new **AHS Mission and Vision Statements**.

•2021: Launch of **Conversations with Great American Gardeners**, a series of live webinars featuring AHS Award winners.

•2021: **Marcia Zech** elected Board Chair and **Keith P. Tomlinson** is named AHS Director. New Board reaffirms commitment to keeping River Farm as AHS headquarters.