

1. Welcome to Laurelwood Arboretum John and Dorothy Knippenberg purchased this 30-acre property in the 1940s and developed it as Laurelwood Gardens, a thriving commercial rhododendron and azalea nursery. Through the years they created many unique rhododendrons and azaleas and became recognized as leaders in the field. The Knippenbergs had long intended that the property become a public rhododendron park. In 2007 it officially became a Wayne Township public park and, in accordance with Dorothy's wishes, was renamed Laurelwood Arboretum. Through public and non-profit cooperation, the property is maintained and managed by the non-profit support organization Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum.

2. Knippenberg Center for Education and Educational Greenhouse These facilities provide space for educational programs, exhibits, community activities and accessible restrooms. Funding was provided by the Passaic County Board of Commissioners, the Wayne Township Open Space Fund and Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum. All the furniture and electronic equipment were donated by local supporters.

3. Wetlands Garden Located between the Pines Lake Drive West parking lot entrance and exit, the Wetlands Garden is an area in which water pools on the surface after heavy or prolonged rains. Plants that do well in this habitat and are grown here include river birch, dappled willow, maiden grass, pennisetum and leucothoe. A wooden walkway extends into the area, for viewing both the garden and a plaque identifying the plants. The garden and walkway were generously donated by Pines Lake resident James Veale and family.

4. Sensory Garden This is a garden of colorful blooms, interesting textures, restful sounds and fragrant blossoms for the senses of sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell. The space can be negotiated by wheelchairs, and raised flower beds permit easier access for all visitors. This special space was funded by the Passaic County Board of Commissioners, Wayne Township, the Lions Club of Wayne and West Milford and Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum.

5. Summer Garden This colorful garden features an Adirondack-style bench designed by David Robinson. Funding was provided by a close friend of Dorothy Knippenberg.

5a. Propagation Greenhouse This greenhouse is on the site of the original rhododendron propagation greenhouse. It is used to propagate rhododendrons and other historically significant plants and serves as the working greenhouse for Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum volunteers to grow plants for plant sales and display gardens.

6. Laurel Pond One of the first construction projects in the arboretum, it is an expansion of an existing stream that helps to manage drainage and occasional seasonal high water. It is the primary irrigation source for the gardens and features two fountains that help to improve water quality.

7. Azalea Way This is a spectacular path especially in mid-May when azaleas, hybridized by Joseph Gable of Pennsylvania, are in full bloom. Among the hybrids are 'Herbert,' 'Stewartonian,' 'Rose Greeley' and on the right side, the newest addition, 'Laurelwood Sunset,' hybridized by Dr. Al Fitzburgh. At the bend, on the uphill side, are a cluster of R. 'Windbeam,' small-leaf rhododendron hybridized by Guy Nearing, a gifted botanist who hybridized hardy and dwarf rhododendrons in New Jersey.

8. Knippenberg Memorial Gazebo This feature was constructed on the site where Dorothy and her volunteers would sit on a ring of tree stumps after a long work session. Overlooking the pond, the gazebo was created by David Robinson using wood of the osage orange and red cedar trees. Funds were provided by a close friend of the Knippenbergs and Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum.

9. Brook Road This path meanders alongside the brook and passes several bridges built by Boy Scouts. See if you can spot the "Bridge to Nowhere" and the "Door to Nowhere." Notice the tall white oaks, magnolias, river birch and a magnificent climbing hydrangea reaching high into the upper story of an ash tree.

10. Dorothy's Way This 500 foot path traverses the gentle slope parallel to Brook Road. It is believed that many of the plantings along its length were part of a Knippenberg hybrid test gardens. The rhododendrons usually bloom in late May. The trail was constructed by volunteers of all ages, and the wooden arbors at each end were Eagle Scout projects.

11. Lilac Walk Just before the South Rock Garden, turn right to find the entrance to a collection of lilacs with purple, blue, pink, white, yellow and bicolor blossoms. Full bloom usually occurs two weeks before and after Mother's Day.

11a. Environmental Nature Preserve The Environmental Preserve is a land-restoration project in an area that was previously used for composting and materials storage. It is designed to educate the public about the importance of biodiversity and sustainable ecosystems. It features native plantings that support pollinators, insects and birds. The aerator fountain in the pond helps to improve the water quality and control the build-up of duckweed and algae. An outdoor seating area using carved out tree trunks and tree stumps will provide a classroom area for educational programs for students and visitors to the arboretum. Funding was provided by grants from the Columbia Bank Foundation and the Marturano Thompson Foundation.

12. South Rock Garden One of Dorothy's favorites, this garden was renovated by the North American Rock Garden Society and continues to be improved and maintained by community groups and Laurelwood Arboretum volunteers and staff. The garden also features a bridge built by an Eagle Scout.

13. Dawn Redwood Glade The Dawn Redwood is an unusual tree once known only from fossils but then discovered in China in 1947. It is one of the few deciduous, cone-bearing trees. Bright green needles turn brick red before shedding in autumn. This specimen was gifted to the Knippenbergs and was one of the first planted in the US.

14. Ridge Road This path offers unique views of the arboretum and rare collections of hybrid rhododendrons and tall Eastern Hemlocks, remnants of old growth ravine forests that have existed since the last ice age.

15. Eastern Hemlock Located on Ridge Road, this is one of the last remaining hemlock groves in the area having been protected against woolly adelgid, an insect that decimated hemlocks in the eastern part of North America.

16. 'Edith Bogue' Southern Magnolia At the corner of Ridge Road and Long Valley Road is a beautiful specimen featuring long, broad, glossy leaves. It is the hardiest of the southern magnolias. It has 4" fragrant white flowers in late June, followed by red fruit in September and dried pods throughout the winter. The original seedling of this tree was purchased in 1917 from a Florida nursery by Edith Bogue of Montclair, NJ.

17. Hybrid Rhododendron Collection A grove of Dexter Rhododendrons grows just past Long Valley Road on the right. Charles Dexter, a hybridizer from Cape Cod, created some of the most beautiful big-leaf rhododendrons. On the left side is a mix of large and small-leaf rhododendrons.

18. Spring Garden At the intersection of Ridge Road, Fairway and Easy Way is a statuesque Kousa (Japanese) dogwood. It is a deciduous tree native to eastern Asia with extremely showy flowers in late spring. Bulbs at its base are in bloom from April to May.

19. Native Habitat Garden The Native Habitat Garden features plants that provide nectar and pollen for pollinators, larval host plants for butterflies, and shrubs with berries to feed the birds. The area was designed to provide an eco-friendly habitat that will help sustain insects and birds, which are facing significant population declines. It includes plants for both sun and shade. Funding was provided by a grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust.

20. Easy Way Named for its slope, which is more gradual than Home Hill, Easy Way takes you back toward the Knippenberg Center. The hillside is covered with white foxglove in early summer because, loyal to Dorothy's wishes, staff and volunteers remove the errant pink ones that occasionally appear.

Self-Guided Tour and Map



Photo by Lorraine Meyer

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Connecting People with Nature

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