Spring Planting
Preparing For Tomorrow’s Landscape

Methdical and regular renewal is needed to maintain the health and world-class standing of a collection encompassing some 16,000 accessions. To accomplish this, the Arnold Arboretum grounds staff carries out a planting regimen each fall (coniferous plants) and spring (deciduous plants). This spring, more than 100 plants were relocated from the Arboretum’s nurseries to the grounds to become part of the Arboretum’s living history.

Each season’s plantings has been preceded by several years of care in the greenhouse and nurseries. The plants come from a number of sources. Some have been grown from seed collected on field trips by Arboretum staff; others are acquired in exchanges with other botanical gardens; still others are propagated in our greenhouses from existing stock. Taxa with fewer than three representative accessions of known wild provenance or with individuals in decline may be propagated to ensure a handful of successful nursery specimens. Typically, as these plants grow in size, saplings are transferred to nursery soil while shrubs are cultivated in containers.

Living collections co-directors Tom Ward and Julie Coop begin the planting season with an evaluation of these nursery holdings. The plant records department provides them with a list of plants in the Arboretum nurseries, accompanied by a list of like species on the grounds. Plants in the nursery are selected for planting based not only on collections policy criteria, but also on the number, age, and relative condition of similar accessions on the grounds. Those destined for the grounds are grouped, flagged, and included in a planting list.

Once the list has been finished, Tom and Julie stake out locations, the plant records department creates two accession tags for each new planting. After these tags are attached, grounds crew members ball and burlap the plants for removal from the nursery. As each new accession is planted, its stake, which will remain beside the plant for a few years, is driven into the ground next to it. Watering and mulching crews use these stakes to identify new plantings that require their attention, and plant records staff use them for mapping.

Of note among the items on this year’s spring list were five native dogwoods (Cornus florida) and a magnolia species, Magnolia liliiflora, that were added to the perimeter of the Leventritt Garden. As in other recent years, many new accessions were planted in the Leventritt Garden, which entered its fourth growing season. Also, replacements for older individuals of some genera, such as Malus, and those affected by disease, including Sorbus, are planted annually, a practice that will continue until those collections stabilize. Fall planting will commence in late September.

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Left Kristin DeSouza, a member of the grounds crew, unties a newly planted winterberry holly (Ilex verticillata) in the Leventritt Garden. Right Grounds crew member Jen Kettell prepares the root ball of a nursery plant for transplanting on the grounds.