

Renovation Creates a Brighter Azalea Border

This spring, horticulture staff devoted considerable time and energy to rejuvenating the colorful and historically significant display of azaleas and other members of the Ericaceae along Meadow Road. With the assessment of existing collections and the addition of a number of new plantings, the Arboretum's renovation of Azalea Border seeks to invigorate a major landscape design project begun nearly sixty years ago.

Famed landscape architect Beatrix Farrand, retained as a consulting landscape gardener by the Arboretum in 1946, suggested installing azalea beds along the east side of Meadow Road. Many plants were relocated from Azalea Path on Bussey Hill, where the plants had suffered through several successive dry summers. The massed beds included native American sweet azalea (*Rhododendron arborescens*), rose-shell azalea (*Rhododendron prinophyllum*), and other azaleas arranged according to flower color. Other members of the Ericaceae were interspersed in the planting scheme, including *Vaccinium* (blueberries), *Enkianthus*, *Lyonia*, and *Zenobia*.



Julie Coop

Azalea Border has diminished over the years as the wetlands of the meadow crept closer to Meadow Road, effectively drowning the border plantings. Other plants, suffering from perpetual "wet feet", have either declined or been removed, and the beds have lost their original shape due to the fluctuating water table of the area. Staff are examining the hydrology of the planting beds and planting new azaleas on the higher ground found closer to the road.

A Fresh Start



Nancy Sableski

Three years ago, the Arnold Arboretum began hosting educational visits for students participating in Head Start, an early childhood development program for low-income families. This year, the Arboretum designed a new curriculum and invited Arboretum Field Studies guides to facilitate the visits. Program enhancements include teaching in smaller groups to allow for increased individual attention, creating specific curricula around seasonal themes, and introducing supplemental classroom materials to increase the program's impact. With many of these young explorers returning in future years as Field Studies participants, the program is a first step along their way to understanding the natural world and appreciating the Arboretum as a neighborhood resource.

Arboretum curator Michael Dosmann and horticulture manager Julie Coop traveled to Apalachee Nursery in Tennessee to procure plants for the renovation. The nursery, which specializes in ericaceous plants, maintains seed provenance records for its stock, greatly enhancing their scientific value. The resurrected collection will feature more native azaleas, including *Rhododendron arborescens*, *R. periclymenoides*, *R. atlanticum*, and *R. viscosum*. The latter two, known commonly as coastal azalea and swamp azalea respectively, are more water tolerant and may prove to be happier in the site than past residents. These species are also deserving from a collections standpoint, as the addition of more wild-collected material increases the size and value of our holdings. With the successful establishment of new plantings and curatorial review, the collection may continue to expand in future seasons. ♻️