Once upon a time, finding a particular plant in the Arnold Arboretum landscape required digging through plant lists, accession cards, and drawers of hand-drawn maps. The introduction of digitization and databasing of the Arboretum’s collections simplified this process, but still required seekers to cross reference location codes with a paper map to locate the tree, shrub, or vine in question. Now with the arrival of Collection Researcher, the Arboretum’s new online map application, it is easier than ever to find a specific plant on the grounds—even if you happen to be searching from the other side of the world.

Available for virtual explorations via the Arboretum website, Collection Researcher links the institution’s rich documentation of its living collection with a robust geographic information system (GIS) that pinpoints plant locations in the landscape. The application launches with an aerial view of the Arboretum and its surrounding neighborhoods, inviting interactions that are similar to those facilitated by Google Maps and other online map applications. Staff, researchers, and visitors can access or hide multiple layers of information—like plants, roads, and place names—and can quickly navigate to precise locations in the landscape with a couple mouse clicks. Once you’ve zoomed into a location of interest, you can select plants to reveal what the Arboretum knows about them, like their taxonomy, growth habit, condition, size, and age.

Once you know the basics, Collection Researcher offers a host of tools to help you find out exactly what you’d like to know. Let’s say, for example, you want to know if the Arboretum has any living accessions of the Sargent oak, Quercus × sargentii. The Text Search tool allows you to find it by using its scientific or common name, family, or even its Arboretum accession number. Each query returns a list of plants that satisfy your criteria, with their geo-referenced locations in the landscape highlighted on the base map. These results can then be explored individually or as a group that can be exported for analysis in other desktop applications like Microsoft Excel. Results also include links to an array of international plant information resources, which enable both researchers and casual visitors alike to extend the scope of their inquiries beyond the Arboretum itself. One can browse photographs of the plant in Google Maps as well as other information about its origins, care, and other details.

Since the 1990s, Arboretum staff have captured the global positioning system (GPS) coordinates for each of the accessioned plants in the Arboretum’s living collection. These sets of data provide the basis for the functionality of Collection Researcher.
Visit Collection Researcher online to explore, search, and learn about the Arboretum’s collection of living plants. In the top center of the webpage header bar there are several icons that launch various map tools. Use the Search widget (binoculars icon) to locate plants. You can manually select all plants in a particular area by drawing on the map with the selection tool, or find a specific plant by partial or complete scientific name, common name, family name, or Arboretum accession number. Collection Researcher displays the results of your search as red push pins on the map, each representing an individual plant that meets your criteria. It also compiles a list view which includes links to additional information resources on the plant, including repositories for images, herbarium specimens, and preserved germplasm. Search lists may also be displayed as a grid, which allows users to export the information for offline use. For easier navigation to featured collections, the Bookmarks widget (open book icon) allows you to jump to different areas of the landscape, or to create a placeholder for the portion of the map you’re studying.

For more detailed instructions and a short video tutorial, visit the "Getting Started" page on our website: http://arboretum.harvard.edu/plants/collection-researcher/