

Explorers Garden

A New Name for a Treasured Destination

Julie Warsowe, Manager of Visitor Education

For decades Chinese Path could be described as a pearl in an oyster—a delight to behold, but difficult to find. This beautiful area of Bussey Hill, such an important part of the Arboretum’s history and collections, needed a more accurate epithet, one that would attract more visitors and set clear expectations. Recently the Arnold Arboretum gave the area around and including Chinese Path a new name: the Explorers Garden.

When we installed a new sign system last winter, our primary goal was to help visitors navigate the Arboretum without confusion. Chinese Path posed several challenges to that goal. Not only were its entrances unmarked and inconspicuous, but the very name confused visitors, who for years have asked how it got its name and how its plantings were related to each other.

Although the name has been in use for decades, both “Chinese” and “Path” are misnomers. True, many of the plants are Chinese in origin, but there are also important plants from other countries in Asia and from North America. The oldest documented *Franklinia alatamaha*, the southeastern native tree (now extinct in the wild) discovered in 1765 and named in honor of Benjamin Franklin, is a perfect example of the confusion inherent in using “Chinese” in the name. Likewise, the term “Path” minimizes the significance of this gallery of legacy trees that includes historic specimens collected in China like the dove tree (*Davidia involucrata* var. *vilmoriniana*) and the paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*), as well as rare North American species such as the Florida yew (*Taxus floridana*).

“The name, ‘Explorers Garden,’ calls forth the true spirit of a remarkable gathering of plants,” says Richard Schulhof, deputy director, “and evokes the rich tradition of exploration and research that continues to this day at the Arboretum.” At least since 1904, when the cedars of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani* var. *stenocoma*) were planted—a species that had never before survived in Boston—the area has been recognized as a good spot to test plants of unknown or marginal hardiness gathered by plant explorers. From E. H. Wilson in the early 1900s to the Sino-American Botanical Expedition, begun in 1980 and continuing today, explorers have brought new plants to test in its favorable microclimate.



Davidia involucrata var. *vilmoriniana*; Bob Mayer

The new name, Explorers Garden, does not replace Chinese Path. The horseshoe-shaped path retains its name, but the area including the open lawn ringed by cedars of Lebanon and the glorious Chinese sand pear (*Pyrus pyrifolia*) will finally have a name that marks it as a destination and expresses the richness and historical significance of the collection. This season, discover the Explorers Garden on a guided tour or on your own. The plants listed below are just a sampling of the gems you’ll see.

April: Don’t miss the assorted winterhazels (*Corylopsis* spp.), with pendulous yellow flowers spilling onto the path.

May: The dove tree (*Davidia involucrata* var. *vilmoriniana*) demands a pilgrimage, as do the many varieties of tree peonies (*Paeonia* spp.).

June: The Chinese fringetree (*Chionanthus retusus*) located here has been called the finest specimen in the world—you be the judge.

July/August: The *Poliothyrsis sinensis* here is the only specimen that famed horticulturist Michael Dirr has ever seen in bloom. Don’t miss the large, fragrant clusters of white flowers in late summer offset by glossy green leaves.

September: Flowers and fall foliage at the same time—you won’t believe it until you see the champion *Franklinia alatamaha* in September. ↻

Join Arboretum curator Michael Dosmann for a tour:

The Explorers Garden

Saturday, May 17 1:00-3:00pm [HB]

See page 14 for details. Free, but registration is requested.