Mountain Laurel

*Kalmia latifolia*
Look closely at the flower

Mountain laurel is a large evergreen flowering shrub native to the eastern United States. In old age the plants becomes picturesque with gnarly trunks and limbs. At the Arboretum, they are planted at the base of Hemlock Hill where they are protected from the full effects of the sun by the hill behind them and the soil is moist and cool. The beauty of the flowers is heightened by the dark background of hemlocks.

In June, mountain laurels produce an abundance of flowers in terminal panicles. When fully expanded each flower is nearly an inch in diameter. The fused petals (collectively called the corolla) range in color from white to dark pink. The inner surface is usually marked with a waving dark rose-colored line and delicate purple speckles.

Look closely at the flowers (or the drawing) to see that each one has 10 stamens. When the flowers first open, the anthers are tucked into little pockets in the corolla. The filament is sensitive and when touched (usually by insects) it springs up, releasing the anther and its pollen.

Kalmia is a genus which is native only in North America and is mostly confined to the eastern part of the country. It is one of the most beautiful of hardy flowering shrubs and for New England the most valuable of the broad-leaved evergreens. It is a member of the heath family (Ericaceae) which also includes another well-known late spring flowering evergreen, rhododendron.

Letterboxing!

Letterboxing is a fun way to explore the mountain laurels at the Arboretum. For more information on letterboxing, go to www.letterboxing.org.

To find the letterbox, follow these directions:

- Go to the intersection of Valley Hill and Hemlock Hill Roads. Find the fire hydrant, this is the starting point.
- Take 36 steps west on Hemlock Hill Rd to the purple leaved European Beech ‘Riversii’.
- Take another 48 steps to the old white oak tree accession 286-2011-A.
- Go another 55 steps, look to your left to see the unique featherpetal mountain laurel.
- Take another 43 steps and have a rest under the Japanese yew wild collected in 1892 by the Arboretum’s first director, Charles Sprague Sargent.
- Continue another 43 steps to the next green bench.
- Just beyond the bench is a mass of mountain laurel with dark pink buds/blossoms accession 1129-74-E. Look under the branches at the edge of the grass to find the letterbox. Follow the directions inside, and leave everything just as you found it.