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Complimentary

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It's Not About Lifestyle - It's About A Way of Life



The Hidden World
of Willowood



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Photography by Susan E. Pedersen

In 1908, Henry and Robert Tubbs, two brothers who shared a love for gardening and a keen interest in horticulture, left the confines of New York City in search of a country home in rural New Jersey. Uninspired by the grand estates they were first shown, their quest led them to Gladstone, where they discovered a farmstead nestled in a valley, with a simple frame house and a cluster of rustic outbuildings surrounded by fields and traversed by a meandering brook lined with giant weeping willows. They purchased the property, known as "Paradise Farm" and rechristened it "Willowwood."

The Tubbs brothers were eventually joined at Willowwood by a young, author-lecturer-horticulturist from the College of Agriculture at Rutgers University named Dr. Benjamin Blackburn. Together, they created Willowwood Arboretum, New Jersey's "most comprehensive and longest continually operating Arboretum."

Today, Willowwood is part of the Morris County Park Commission, which along with the stewardship and support of the non-profit Willowwood Foundation, and the efforts of countless, enthusiastic donors and volunteers, maintains and evolves a unique green space of historic tree and plant collections, formal gardens, undisturbed forests, and flowering meadows, that encompass 130 acres and include 2,100 varieties of native and exotic plants.

But often unnoticed among the splendor of the wisteria arbor, the majesty of the Dawn Redwood, the Japanese maples that adorn the Cypress Lawn, and the fragrant allure of the famed Wilson lemon tree, are Willowwood's full-time residents, who weave webs in the meadow grasses, build nests in weathered bird boxes, or scamper from carefully hidden warrens beneath the shrubbery. But careful observation will reveal a fluttering set of delicate wings, a predator hiding in a silken lair, a buzzing among the flowers, or perhaps just a quick leap from a lily pad to the depths of the cypress pool.

They watch as a couple strolls the garden paths, or as patient photographers



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wait for a perfect hue. And they flitter cautiously or duck for leafy cover as excited children on a scavenger hunt search for pairs of pachyderms or the elusive Pan, peaking above the boxwoods. They don't seem to notice a trio of troubadours making music beneath an arbor while listeners on lawn chairs tap their feet to the rhythm and bluegrass. Who has time to stop and smell the lilacs when there is nectar to be sipped, pollen to be gathered or clovers to be munched? When the sun sets they head for their homes and let the night shift emerge as life goes on at Willowood Arboretum.

Willowood Arboretum, located at 300 Longview Rd., Far Hills, NJ, is open free to the public daily, 365 days yearly from dawn to dusk. To learn more, visit www.willowoodarboretum.org or www.morrisparks.net.

