As the days lengthen and the buds on branches and limbs above us burst open, an arboretum provides a lovely opportunity to welcome spring and experience the beauty and variety of Mother Nature's trees. Did you know that there are several noteworthy ones nearby?

BY DEBORAH WEISBERG

While Pittsburgh abounds in public parks, people who value green space may be surprised to know that the city also boasts a number of internationally accredited arboreta—botanical gardens devoted to trees—and they're all in or around the East End. They include The Frick Pittsburgh, the Chatham University and Carnegie Mellon University campuses, and The Homewood and Allegheny cemeteries.

Each is among just 426 arboreta in 33 countries to have been recognized for the abundance and diversity of their trees, shrubs, and woody ornamentals by ArbNet, the Illinois-based nonprofit that sets standards for excellence in community forests.

Being part of a global network helps to highlight the aesthetic and environmental importance of cultivating woodland habitats, especially in a city setting where retaining trees is an ongoing challenge, says Matt Erb, an International Society of Arborists (ISA) certified arborist who, as director of urban forestry for Tree Pittsburgh, has helped guide the development of local arboreta.

"Between 2010 and 2015, Pittsburgh lost 1,000 trees that were cleared by developers or by homeowners who decided they were tired of raking leaves," he says. "That's 1,000 fewer trees absorbing storm-water runoff, filtering air pollutants, and providing habitat for owls, hawks, songbirds, and other wildlife."

The free guided tours and other outreach that ArbNet requires for accreditation helps to foster a greater appreciation of trees and, along with it, a desire to conserve them, Erb says.
ArbNet accreditation was a natural next step in the tree program at each of these sister cemeteries, says ISA-certified arborist Stephen Foley, who developed their arboretum master plans.

“When Homewood was accredited in 2014 it was one of just 23 American cemeteries to have that designation,” he says, noting that Allegheny followed in 2019.

Burial grounds represent a fast-growing segment of officially designated arboretas well-suited to ArbNet’s mission, says ArbNet coordinator Sue Piait.

“The cemetery group has really caught on in the past five years as people realize they are more than cemeteries, especially on the East Coast where there are so many beautiful tree collections. You’re very woody out there.”

Because Homewood is a lawn park-style cemetery, a style characterized by a pastoral setting, trees have been planted strategically over time to enhance—rather than dominate—in its 200-acre landscape.

More than 40 species are represented in the Point Breeze cemetery, including towering oaks, London planes, and horse chestnuts, with an understory of flowering dogwoods, ornamental Japanese maples and other smaller varieties. Standout specimens include an iconic weeping willow at the cemetery’s lily pond, and a weeping beech that graces the grave of industrialist Henry Aiken.

There’s also an impressive array of hemlocks, cypress, pine, and spruce to ensure year-round interest, Foley notes.

While a forested area was clear-cut to create The Homewood Cemetery from scratch in 1878, Allegheny Cemetery was built to work in harmony with woods that already existed on the grounds in 1844, Foley says of the 300-acre burial ground located in Lawrenceville and bounded by Bloomfield, Garfield, and Stanton Heights.

Plantings done since have been in keeping with Allegheny’s rural style, an aesthetic designed to provide the public access to a landscaped, outdoor setting before public parks were developed. Today they include 26 kinds of native and non-native trees, namely white and northern red oaks, American beech, basswood, black gum, sugar and red maples, yellow buckeye, hackberry, hawthorn, pine, lin-
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Similar to The Homewood and Allegheny cemeteries, Chatham's arboretum is considered non-traditional because, while being a community forest is not the university's primary function, it is nonetheless a valuable asset.

Chatham's tree collection includes seven varieties of magnolia, 10 kinds of oak, and half a dozen redbuds, such as weeping forest pansy, hearts of gold, and vanilla twist. In addition, there are copper and American beech, American elm, yew, eastern hemlock, paw paw trees, four young giant sequoias, and two bald cypresses, one of which is estimated to be 120 years old.

Significant single specimens include a hawthorn tree planted in honor of the 9/11 victims, a blight-resistant chestnut bred and donated by the American Chestnut Foundation, and Japanese and Russian larches planted by visitors from both of those countries, Spiril says.

Among shrubs, there are six types of hydrangea, including oakleaf and Annabelle, as well as bottlebrush buckeye, beauty berry, summersweet, clethra alnifolia, forsythia, Korean spice viburnum, witch hazel, and a native honeysuckle vine.

As with any garden, Chatham's arboretum is a work in progress, says Spiril, noting that some of the newer installations include several dwarf gingko biloba Mariken trees planted last fall. "They remind me of the lollipop trees in Dr. Seuss's The Lorax and will delight some of our younger visitors."

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As part of its commitment to environmental sustainability, CMU became ArbNet-accredited in 2019. It achieved Level 1 status and is now working to attain Level II status by adding educational elements to its arboretum, says Jenn Rogers, project manager at the university’s facilities management and campus services department.

The tree collection on CMU’s 140-acre campus includes 85 kinds of trees and 90 varieties of shrubs. “We have a beautiful aspen grove next to the Gates and Hillman centers, and my favorite is probably the katsura tree in the peace garden near the Frew Street entry to the Hall of Arts,” Rogers says. “It smells like cotton candy in autumn and has a striking fall color—a mix of lemon, yellow, and apricot with rounded heart-shaped leaves.”

Above: The fernlike foliage of this honey locust makes it a standout specimen near the CMU School of Drama.  
Below: London plane trees line the campus grassy area known as “The Cut.”
THE FRICK PITTSBURGH

Inasmuch as arboreta are living museums, accreditation was a perfect fit for the collection of trees at The Frick Pittsburgh in Point Breeze.

"What sets us apart from other local museums is that we have a 5½-acre green space," says Amanda Gillen, the Frick's director of learning and visitor experience.

A popular tree guide the Frick published years ago has been replaced by a mobile app visitors can use for self-guided tours.

The Frick's treescape has evolved over many decades and includes specimens with sentimental value, such as those planted as living memorials to Frick family members, including a red maple for Henry Clay Frick and his wife Adelaide, a linden for Dr. Henry Clay Frick II, and a katsura for Helen Clay Frick.

Except for a row of 50 hemlocks that flank the parking lot, most trees on campus are deciduous varieties and include striking specimens such as the tri-color beech, with its mixture of green, pink, and white leaves that turn coppery in fall. "We have several beech varieties including weeping beech—some people call it the upside down tree—and copper beech," says grounds manager Kim Rother.

"Our oldest trees are London plane trees and tulip poplars. We also have saucer magnolias, horse chestnuts, Japanese maples, and Kentucky coffee trees," says Rother. "Those are a visitor favorite, especially when they drop their pods in fall."

Encouraging visitors to appreciate the grounds of the Frick as much as they do its indoor collections is the impetus behind seeking arboretum certification, Gillen says. "When people see a lovely landscape, they absolutely want to know more about what they are looking at."

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**THE HOMEOOD CEMETERY**
Visit thenhomewoodcrematory.com and click on Arboretum under the About tab. In-person visitors to the cemetery can pick up a J.R.R. Tolkien-style tree map designed by mapmaker Stenfor Danielson in the cemetery office.

**CHATHAM UNIVERSITY**
Visit chatham.edu and click on Shadyside Campus under the Locations tab. There you'll find arboretum information and be able to download a tree guide and walking map.

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