

# Longwood Diary

## Andrea Brunsendorf sums up her first year at Longwood Gardens.

Twelve months ago, I arrived at Longwood Gardens on the tail-wind of the ‘Beast from the East,’ which was sweeping across the United Kingdom, just to find myself in my first Nor’easter that was blowing icy wind across my new home, Longwood Gardens in Kennett

Square, Pennsylvania, in the heart of the Brandywine Valley.

Despite the freezing cold, the sense of spring was on both sides of the pond, knocking on the door to greet and announce another gardening year. The arrival of spring also brought my British gardening friends, acquaintances, and colleagues, who knocked on my new office door to wish me well in my career adventure in the U.S.

It is now a year later and I find myself in a similar situation. It is cold on both sides of the pond with spring teasing us and former colleagues from my British gardening days coming by to check how I’m getting along. We were recently delighted to welcome representatives from the Worshipful Company of Gardeners, who knew me from my days at London’s Inner Temple Garden. I was asked straight out what my “revolution” for Longwood will be after having been in my role for 12 months as Director of Outdoor Landscapes.

Astonished by the straight-forwardness of the question, particularly from a Brit, I pondered my choice of words as I wouldn’t describe my vision for the outdoor landscape as a “revolution”. Instead, our team of horticulturists is looking at how we can engage more with the concepts of a collaborative working approach, creating a cohesive garden experience, and continuing to develop environmental awareness. While these are not new concepts in the horticultural world, we want to integrate these concepts more fully into the day-to-day maintenance and development of our garden spaces with, we hope, spectacular results.

Having this set of shared concepts helps to get a large team on the same page, to speak with the same vocabulary, and to unite us on a path forward as we develop designs and rejuvenate select gardens or landscapes. Longwood calls the process of rejuvenating a space “garden amplification”.

It has been enlightening to explore with the team how we can collaborate more closely across the hundreds of acres of gardens that comprise Longwood. I want to encourage my team, which is divided into three different groups in three different areas of the gardens, to exchange and share ideas, inspiration, skills, experience, and knowledge. How can this best be done?

We have begun cross-training on garden tasks that are unique to a particular section, and we are exploring having staff from different sections work in one another’s areas one day a week, so they not only become more familiar with those gardens, but with the challenges of one another’s gardens as well. And to ensure we bring all our expertise together, we have started to invite team members to join and contribute to schematic design discussions on garden amplification projects that aren’t within their own sections.

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Above: A sea of Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa forbesii*) in the Oak & Conifer Knoll (photo: Larry Albee).



*Above:* Native spring ephemerals arriving in Pierce's Woods (photo: Larry Albee).

As we move closer to transitioning into one team instead of three distinct teams, we are also thinking about the transitions between our garden spaces. We are working on a more cohesive garden experience for our guests when they move from the historic part of Longwood, created by Pierre du Pont in the early 1900s, to the garden areas that were designed

when Longwood became a public garden in the 1950s, and to the even more recent garden additions. As great garden enthusiasts, we know how challenging it can be to pull yourself away from the detail of a single plant or a plant combination to look at a space holistically and to consider how it supports the surrounding spaces. How can one space transition to another and maintain its unique qualities but still have the same vocabulary?

We also want to connect our gardens to the surrounding landscape of the Brandywine Valley, which should be an influence and inspiration for our gardens.

Another challenge we are addressing is adding plant interest throughout the late autumn and winter months as our traditional displays have been geared more for late spring, summer and early autumn. We are exploring how the introduction of permanent woody or perennial elements for winter structure would affect the annual bedding design. We also are asking ourselves if the presence of these permanent plants might dilute the seasonal 'wow' factor? There is a balance that we need to strike between the traditional displays and allowing the natural characteristics of the seasons into these spaces.

The team and I have also begun incorporating more environmental and natural processes into our gardening activities and designs. Last autumn, we started to identify areas where we would be able to keep the fallen leaves to break-down in-situ under groves of trees in our informal areas, providing that invaluable wildlife and soil cover during the winter months. We call this 'Leave the Leaves' and it is a great way to share with guests the importance of taking care of our soils as the foundation of a healthy and thriving garden.

So, there you have it: our guiding principles and approach to the amplification of the outdoor gardens. As I complete my first year at Longwood, it also means that my column documenting my first year is also coming to a close. It has been a pleasure sharing my discoveries and experiences with you.

I invite you to come, see, and judge for yourself if our work is a horticultural "revolution", as we think differently, push beyond our comfort levels, and take calculated risks to continue to ensure an extraordinary experience for each and every guest to Longwood.

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*Open all year round. Hours vary.*