

Holly Springs Legacy Garden at Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens

By Jake Summers—Glen Mills, PA

Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens is a place that grows not just gardens, but gardeners. The Hamilton Educational Fellowship at Jenkins is a comprehensive program that prepares emerging professionals for a career in horticulture and related fields. After earning a degree in Botany from Connecticut College, I worked for two years as an arborist in Savannah, Georgia, before accepting the Fellowship and moving back home to Pennsylvania. Every fellow has a project that they champion for the duration of their two years. Out of the list of potential projects, I chose to design and implement the Holly Springs Legacy Garden.

The arboretum had considered expanding into a space on Azalea Hill to create a new Legacy Garden that would feature the Holly Springs Hybrids. Azalea Hill is brimming with hybrid evergreen azaleas that make up a large part of Jenkins' accredited *Rhododendron* collection. When in bloom, the paths are lined with pinks, purples, reds, and whites, and makes it a must-see from late April through late May. I jumped at the opportunity to add to it.

Initially, there was some hesitation from Jenkins leadership about assigning this as a Fellowship project. It was large in scope, especially for an inexperienced gardener like me; it required us to acquire many of the Holly Springs Azaleas; and it would require a great deal of coordination and collaboration with outside partners to make it possible. However, even with potential obstacles to success in my path, the challenge of designing a new garden for our visitors was exhilarating. My excitement was magnified with another purpose of the Legacy Project: to preserve the germplasm (genetic material).

A Legacy Garden preserves and celebrates the cultivars from an individual hybridizer. The Legacy Project was established to ensure that the germplasm of certain azalea cultivars would be preserved for posterity. In this case, it would be for the Holly Springs Hybrids: a collection of relatively small, late-blooming, evergreen azaleas. The Holly Springs Hybrids were created by hybridizer Col. Pete Vines, who sold his azaleas out

of a small nursery in Virginia. In his youth, Pete attended the University of Mississippi, and he named his hybrid collection after Holly Springs, MS, an antebellum town just north of the university. There are close to 100 different named Holly Springs Hybrids, as well as several that have yet to be named.

The process of designing and installing a garden starts well before any plants are bought or soil is disturbed. To begin this project, I first organized plant lists and sorted the Holly Springs by mature height, bloom time, and bloom color. I wanted to make sure that the colors wouldn't clash with any neighboring plants, as the intense blooms tend to be variable, or even bicolor. I also wanted the bloom times to be spread out, ensuring that the garden would have the appearance of blooming continuously during the season. I designed the garden with flower colors at the forefront. When entering the garden, visitors will see pinks transition into oranges, reds, and purples. A streak of white runs through the middle. I mapped out a sinuous path that maximizes the visitor experience of the garden. I decided to leave a few flowering dogwoods and a handful of existing Holly Springs Azaleas that were planted in the space previously, but everything else was transplanted out to make way for this new garden space. Many of the older Holly Springs were heavily rabbit-browsed, so we potted them up to rejuvenate them in our nursery. During the design process, I was connected with Dave Nanney, who is the Legacy Lead for the Holly Springs Hybrids. Dave and his wife, Leslie, visited Jenkins in September 2020, bringing with them 56 Holly Springs Azaleas that were donated by the Northern Virginia Chapter (NVA) of the Azalea Society of America (ASA). Shortly thereafter, Rick Bauer, an original member of the team that developed the Legacy Project, and his wife Susan, stopped by Jenkins to deliver an additional 61 Holly Springs Azaleas.

Carolyn and Paul Beck were also instrumental in the completion of this project. They transported 98 Holly Springs azaleas, donated by the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA, to Jenkins before this project even started (in 2018). In 2021, Caro-

lyn contacted us to donate an additional 26 mature Holly Springs azaleas from their personal garden in Virginia (many over 30 years old). After seeing the size and quality of the plants, we couldn't refuse. I am so grateful for their coordination, outreach, generosity, and assistance.

After acquiring the plants from Virginia, it was time to start preparing the site. With the help of our faithful garden volunteers, we raked out the debris from the Holly Springs area and filled any existing holes with soil. With the space newly cleared, it was finally time to get to planting. On planting day, we were very thankful to have Tyler Arboretum's horticulture staff join us and our garden volunteers to assist with the planting. The additional help allowed us to finish most of the planting in one busy morning, putting in close to 180 plants. The design came out even better than I had hoped. The space is virtually unrecognizable from what it was previously.

Holly Springs Legacy Garden as viewed from the entrance the day of the ceremony. Inset: Holly Springs Azalea Hybrid 'Larry Martin' flower. Photos by Lisa Roper.

After the planting, we received yet another generous donation from the NVA of the ASA for buying companion plants. A dynamic garden is constantly evolving, and the next phase of this project is to underplant the azaleas with complementary groundcovers. These include ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*), snowy barrenwort (*Epimedium* × *youngianum* 'Niveum'), and heartleaf skullcap (*Scutellaria ovata*). These plants, among other herbaceous perennials and understory trees, will add off-season interest and complement the Holly Springs Azaleas with their flowers and foliage.

We installed two benches in the garden, one of which was donated by the NVA in honor of Pete Vines. This gives visitors the opportunity to relax and enjoy the space. Finally, we installed an informational plaque that explains the Legacy Garden to any curious guests.

On May 15th, we held a dedication ceremony for the legacy garden. Many of the NVA chapter





The Tour of the Holly Springs Legacy Garden the day of the ceremony.
Photo by Rick Bauer.

members were able to attend, and we were honored by the presence of Pete Vines and his family. I finally was able to meet the man whose legacy will now live on at Jenkins. Pete seemed very touched by the ceremony and in seeing so many of his plants in a public garden.

This project gave me the opportunity to design a space from the ground up, and it allowed me to express the culmination of my horticultural knowledge. Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens is free of an admission fee and is open year-round. Stop by from May-June to see the new Holly Springs Legacy Garden in all its glory. We hope to see you in the garden!

About the Author:

Jake Summers is an arborist and horticulturist who lives in Glen Mills, PA. He earned a degree in botany from Connecticut College in 2016. After college, Jake worked for Bartlett Tree Experts in Savannah, GA, before he moved back to his home state of Pennsylvania. He worked at Jenkins Arboretum and Gardens as a Hamilton Educational

Fellow. At Jenkins, Jake designed and established the Holly Springs Legacy Garden, which houses a collection of rare azalea hybrids. Jake also has a passion for food security, and volunteers his time at Martha’s Community Farm, where he has created a mushroom cultivation program. In his spare time, Jake loves to forage for mushrooms with his partner, Heather, and his dog, Beau.



The plaque for the Holly Springs bench, donated in Pete’s honor. Photo by Steve Wright.

Jake Summers (left) and Pete Vines (right) sitting on the donated bench in the Holly Springs Legacy Garden. Photo by Susan Bauer.



	<p align="center">AZALEA HILL GARDENS & NURSERY</p> <p align="center">EVERGREEN AZALEAS</p> <p align="center"><i>We grow Glenn Dale, Back Acres, Robin Hill, Satsuki, Huang, Holly Springs and others</i></p> <p align="center">Request list: email ronnie.palmer88@yahoo.com or text 870-489-0884</p> <p align="center">1106 S. Evans Road Pine Bluff, Arkansas 71602 Phone (870) 247-1574</p> <p align="center">Visit www.azaleahillgardens-arkansas.com</p>	
--	---	--