

Garden Sections from 2015's Printed Tour Booklet, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens.

Note: In 2016, outdoor interpretive garden signs were created, and visitors are now able to read the helpful signs, which include images, in each garden.

Garden Tour

Use the map to lead you through the garden. Begin your tour in front of the Mansion.

The design and function of the gardens and buildings are as they were during Post's residence at Hillwood. Experience the garden spaces in their entirety, then appreciate the individual elements—sculpture, architecture, and plants—that shape these environments.

This tour of the gardens takes approximately forty-five minutes and is less than a half-mile walk. Use the Hillwood Visitor Map to orient yourself throughout your stroll.

Introduction

Marjorie Post intended for visitors to Hillwood to delight in the treasures found inside as well as outside the Mansions. She wanted her guests to experience her collections and gardens within an ambience that she purposely worked to create.

In the early twentieth century, many wealthy Americans built estates that allowed them to escape the noise and dirt of the city, but still remain close enough to easily access town. Landscape architect Willard Gebhart designed Hillwood, originally known as Arbremont, in 1926, on twenty-five acres surrounded by natural woodlands. At the time, this area was rural suburban Washington, D.C.

From 1955 to 1957, during renovations carried out after Marjorie purchased the estate, elements of the existing landscape were incorporated into garden "rooms" that featured a variety of historical styles combined with current horticultural designs. Marjorie wanted each garden room to have a distinct character and yet fit into the estate as a whole. Vestiges of Gebhart's original design remain, including the general shape of the Lunar Lawn and the Rose Garden, Hillwood's seclusion from outside disturbances, and the manner in which the gardens are an extension of the Mansion's indoor living space.

Motor Court

Marjorie's guests arrived at the enclosed Motor Court via the current winding, uphill driveway and were escorted, under the covered porte cochere, into the house by her butler. The azaleas, dogwoods, and camellias that flower in the spring provide a colorful welcome, and with the brick wall, help screen the greenhouses and staff quarters from view. The elliptical shape of the Motor Court allowed streams of cars to smoothly enter and exit the estate at the same time through the main driveway to the right. Drivers used the exit toward the Visitor Center to park cars out of sight while guests enjoyed their stay at the estate.

In the center of the Motor Court stands a statue of an adolescent Eros amid planted swags of English ivy (*Hedera helix*) and boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens* 'Aureo-variegato'). Welcoming visitors, the youthful god of love pulls an arrow from his quiver as he shields a goat, a symbol of fertility. Post carefully orchestrated her guests' experience of Hillwood to delight and amaze them as they moved through the estate. She hired the landscape architectural firm of Innocenti and Webel to create this pleasant first encounter of Hillwood.

The Mansion

Although Marjorie's guests first viewed the Mansion from the Motor Court, it is actually the back of the house. The more impressive façade faces the Lunar Lawn on the opposite side of the building. The Mansion's exterior features elements of French architecture, but its lack of symmetry and its massive form suggest no particular style at all. The west side of the Mansion, to the right, was expanded to add rooms to accommodate large numbers of guests. Care was taken to enhance this exterior space and frame the Mansion with colorful plantings nestled around the Motor Court.

Facing the Mansion, proceed right, out of the Motor Court. The archway in the ivy-covered wall to the left leads to the French Parterre. Visitors in wheelchairs continue along the path to the Rose Garden. You can view the French Parterre later in the tour, after the Putting Green

French Parterre

The French Parterre—a formal garden with low intricate plantings divided by footpaths and surrounded by wall of English ivy (*Hedera helix*)—is designed to transport the modern visitor to a small formal garden of the eighteenth century. Standing on the terrace, facing the terra-cotta sculpture of Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt, imagine having just stepped from the French Drawing Room behind you into this delightful garden room. Innocenti and Webel divided this garden into four quadrants using gravel footpaths, channels of moving water, and a central pool lined with Italian glass tile. Their design emphasizes symmetry, geometry, and the garden's architectural features in accordance with French garden traditions.

Fanciful creatures—such as the marble sphinxes, the figures with the head and torso of a woman and the legs of a lion on the balustrade, and the lead cherub riding sea animals in the central pool—lend this garden a sense of whimsy and joy reminiscent of objects in Marjorie's French collection. Outdoor furniture arranged in semicircular niches makes this garden perfect for formal yet intimate gatherings. The design of the boxwood scrolls (*microphylla* 'Morris Dwarf,' an evergreen that takes regular pruning well) derives from a detail of a wrought iron fence and evokes the organic decoration seen on many of the French objects in the adjacent drawing room. This garden reflects Post's passion for the culture and luxury of the eighteenth-century French aristocracy that is also evident in her bedroom and dressing room overlooking the garden.

Exit the French Parterre through the archway to the right of the statue of Diana. Where the path forks, turn to the left and walk toward the brick and wood pergola into the Rose Garden.

Rose Garden

This is one of the few places where you can see how Hillwood's gardens have evolved during the twentieth century. The wood and brick pergola, with its climbing roses and white wisteria that bloom in the spring, and the steps leading to the Putting Green were part of Willard Gebhart's original design. In 1956 Marjorie Post hired Perry Wheeler, who had assisted with the design of the White House rose garden, to adapt this garden to her taste. Wheeler's design called for an intricate balance between the beds—each planted with a single variety of summer-blooming floribunda rose—and the brick paving. Boxwood was planted to complete the circle started by the pergola. The plants in the Rose Garden include early blooming tulips. Marjorie chose this site to house her ashes in the base of the pink granite monument crowned with an antique urn of deep purple porphyry. The monument bears the Post family coat of arms and a Latin inscription that roughly translates as "All my hopes rest in me," a fitting motto for this dynamic, self-sufficient woman.

Beyond the end of the pergola, move toward the brick gate posts topped with lead sculptures of birds and children.

Friendship Walk

Start at the black iron gates that lead from the Rose Garden down the informally planted footpath. This English garden walk, marked with a dedication stone, is flanked by boxwood, rhododendrons, and azaleas. Friendship Walk is an ingenious solution to the eternal question, What do you give someone who has everything? Faced with this problem, in 1957 four of Marjorie's friends involved her chief gardener and landscape architect, Perry Wheeler, in their scheme to build this walkway and the Four Seasons Overlook to honor Post's lifetime of philanthropy.

Four Seasons Overlook

Four lead statues representing the seasons welcome visitors to a circular overlook surrounded by a variety of trees that bloom throughout the year—magnolia, cherry, and dogwood in the spring, and crape myrtle in the summer—providing a cheerful spot for contemplation or conversation. On the bases of these statues are plaques bearing the names of the friends that contributed funds, plants, and statuary for Friendship Walk and this overlook. Combining Marjorie's love of gardens and imperial Russia, the inscription on the center stone is taken from a postcard written by Tsarina Alexandra Feoderovna [*sic*] to one of her good friends: "Friendship outstays the hurrying flight of years and aye abides through laughter and through tears."

Facing the eagles, turn left down the path. Where the path forks, turn left to the Putting Green.

Putting Green

Marjorie believed in living a healthy lifestyle with plenty of fresh air and exercise. She favored dance and golf to keep physically active. The Putting Green, covered with a closely clipped bentgrass turf and enclosed with Japanese hollies (*Ilex crenata*) to keep the balls from rolling away, sports nine numbered metal pins. Here, Marjorie's family and friends practiced their game and rested in the shade of

umbrellas set up on the terraces. The garden is framed with flowering plants, including magnolias and snowball viburnum, with its round, showy white clusters of blooms in May. These plants blend the Putting Green into its informal English garden setting.

Proceed along the path to the Mansion's portico.

Lunar Lawn

Standing on the steps under the Mansion's portico affords a panoramic view of the Lunar Lawn—named for its crescent shape—and the Washington Monument a few miles away. In this open setting, Marjorie hosted receptions not only for Washington's political and social elite, but also for groups representing her philanthropic interests, such as the Boy Scouts of America and the National Symphony Orchestra. Large sweeping American elms (*Ulmus Americana*) surround this lush lawn and frame the view of the monument. Masses of evergreen arborvitae and false cypress, and spring-blooming azaleas, camellias, dogwoods, and magnolia, delight the eye as they enclose the space to create an outdoor room for entertaining on a grand scale. Continuing a tradition established by Marjorie, the horticulture staff adds to the seasonal riot of color by planting thousands of tulips in the spring, annuals in the summer, chrysanthemums in the fall, and pansies in the winter.

From the portico, notice the combination of a time-worn lion, possibly carved in England in 1700, and the blue-and-white lawn furniture from the 1960s. Throughout the gardens and in the Mansion, Post brought pieces of the past into everyday relationships with modern trends. Other surprises, such as the mud scrapers fashioned into black dogs at the foot of the porch, easily coexist with the gilt swan fountain on the far side of the Breakfast Room, the nineteenth-century armillary spheres (encircled with the signs of the zodiac) on either side of the promenade, the eighteenth-century-style sphinxes at the entrance to the French Parterre, and the satyr musicians on the far terrace. These decorative creatures enliven the garden with elegance and whimsy.

From the portico, return to the armillary sphere. Turn left and follow the flagstone path to the Japanese-style Garden.

Japanese-style Garden

Two large, stone guard dogs, a tall granite lantern, and the sound of splashing water signal your arrival at Hillwood's Japanese-style Garden. The overlook between the two dogs offers a view of the water cascading through this hillside garden. Enter the garden between the two limestone sculptures of satyrs on the left side of the terrace. The meandering trails invite visitors to wander and discover the garden's ambiguities and delights. Take time to explore the many surprises waiting at every turn. Follow the stone paths over the pools farther into the garden. Sculptural features, typically used sparingly and overlaid with meaning in Asian gardens, are found throughout this small garden. Among them are the tortoise in the cascade, small stone lanterns, and numerous figures, including Hotei, the Japanese god of happiness and prosperity who is often misidentified as a laughing Buddha.

Standing in front of the wooden gate at the bottom of the hill, look upwards—over the bridges, pines, and the cascade—to view the miniature landscape reminiscent of Japan’s mountainous terrain. Intending to create an artful hybrid of Japanese and American gardening traditions, landscape architect Shogo Myaida combined native and Japanese plant material, such as Japanese pines, maples, azaleas, and false cypress, with Colorado blue spruce. Together, Post and Myaida created a Japanese-American hybrid garden typical of those designed during the 1950s and 1960s.

Return to the terrace at the entrance to the Japanese-style Garden. Walk down the opposite steps and along the path.

Pet Cemetery

Limestone poodles, spaniels, and hounds with baskets of flowers greet visitors at the entrances to this secluded wooded site. Built as a memorial to the pet dogs Marjorie loved throughout her life, this garden’s mood features reinforcing fragrant plants in the center bed and the dogtooth violets (*Erythronium revolutum* var. *pagoda*) scattered among the sweetbox (*Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis*), a groundcover that is particularly fragrant in early March. Marjorie’s last dog, Scampi, the schnauzer featured in a photograph in the downstairs library, was laid to rest in the Pet Cemetery in 1972.

Return to the terrace between the Pet Cemetery and the Japanese-style Garden. Facing the Mansion, turn right and follow the flagstone path to the Dacha.

Dacha

Tucked into a wooded area and surrounded by rhododendrons and azaleas, the Dacha, or Russian country house, is a romanticized interpretation of a small peasant house. Built in 1969 during the Cold War, when U.S.-Soviet relations were tense, the Dacha represents a nostalgic view of Russian culture. The architecture features many elements typical of authentic Russian peasant dwellings, such as the whole-log construction and the intricate carvings around the windows and door. Other details are American adaptations of Russian motifs. For example, the bright colors of the window carvings and the roof’s onion-shaped domes are typical of Russian churches. The Dacha is used for museum programs and Hillwood’s changing exhibitions.

Continue down the flagstone path away from the Mansion. Where the path forks, turn right, toward the Adirondack Building. Visitors in wheelchairs should turn left and follow the flagstone path around the ellipse.

Adirondack Building

Half hidden by a large Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) and umbrella magnolia (*Magnolia tripetela*), this rustic, rough-hewn building recalls the architectural style of Camp Topridge, Post’s summer retreat in the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. Constructed ten years after Marjorie’s death, the building has an unfinished natural exterior and is surrounded by native shrubs. The Adirondack Building is used for museum programs and Hillwood’s changing exhibitions.

Continue down the flagstone path. Where the path forks, turn right and walk up the stone stairs to your left into the cutting garden. Visitors in wheelchairs should follow the stone wall past the greenhouse.

Cutting Garden and Greenhouse

The large, rectangular beds planted with straight rows of flowers indicate that this garden has a utilitarian purpose rather than an ornamental function. The fresh-cut flowers and orchids used in arrangements throughout the Mansion and in the Visitor Center come from this garden and the greenhouse beyond. The selection of flowers in this cutting garden are plants inspired by those used in arrangements during the 1950s and 1960s. Rebuilt in 1996, the greenhouse looks much as it did when Marjorie lived at Hillwood. Inside are a modern working greenhouse, where staff members apply the latest horticulture research and techniques to produce healthy plants throughout the year. The greenhouse nurtures an extensive collection of exotic orchids as well as flowers grown for winter arrangements when the cutting garden is dormant.