

2025 Garden Update: Preservation, Enhancements, and Upcoming Projects

August 27, 2025

This update provides an overview of the recent progress and upcoming horticulture projects designed to preserve, enhance, and sustain the beauty of Hillwood's gardens.

French Parterre Update

- **Elm Replacement Plan**

The replacement of the fallen elm in the French parterre is on hold as we work with the DC Urban Forestry Division (UFD) to consider removing additional declining trees. Our hope is to remove the large diseased elm adjacent to the fallen tree, as well as the two Princeton elms near the portico. The UFD declined this request for 2025, stating that they felt the elm was structurally sound for now. Hillwood will ask again in summer 2026. When we remove the heritage elm, we will also look to remove the Princeton elms.

Hillwood is evaluating new elm replacements. Princeton elms are no longer considered ideal replacement trees due to their susceptibility to poor branch development that leads to disease. Instead, Hillwood is considering the Jefferson Elm, a cultivar introduced by the National Arboretum. The goal is to plant four trees of the same height and structure for a cohesive look.

- **French Parterre Fence & Landscape Updates**

Efforts to secure contractors for fence repairs at the French parterre are ongoing. In the meantime, temporary improvements, such as faux ivy has been utilized.

A review of historic photos revealed that the beds surrounding the two sphinx statues were originally smaller. To better align with historical accuracy, the beds have been adjusted in size. The ivy has been replaced with Barren Strawberry (*Waldsteinia fragarioides*), a plant that has a similar leaf shape to ivy but will fill in and not grow over the statuary, providing better protection for the statues while maintaining a natural aesthetic.

The cherry tree damaged by the fallen elm has a promising chance of recovery. Many new branches have developed to fill in the space. In the future, horticulture staff will choose the best branches and nurture their development to bring the tree back to its original beauty. Rather than replacing it immediately, we will monitor its progress and determine if it can fully regenerate.

Tree Maintenance and Washington Monument View

At the start of 2025, extensive tree work was carried out across the Hillwood campus, including efforts to enhance the view of the Washington Monument by trimming trees along our property. This January, the focus was on significant tree maintenance to ensure that roads and paths remain clear and safe for all visitors. During the March 3 recording of *Day of Horticulture: 2024 Garden Update and 2025 Sneak Peek*, Jessica Bonilla discusses the special setup involving ropes and pulleys used to safely remove a large, dead elm tree at the corner of the Dacha.

Coming Soon: New Plant Identification Program

At the end of 2024, the horticulture department invested in a new mapping program called IrisBG. This program will enable Hillwood to share plant names and locations on our website, making it easier for visitors to explore the garden's flora. The project is currently underway, and we'll keep volunteers updated as the program nears launch and becomes available to the public.

Monument and Porphyry Urn in the Rose Garden

In October 2024, Hillwood's collections staff observed a black discharge beneath the porphyry urn, which also caused staining on the monument. While the cause remains unknown, it has been confirmed that the discharge did not originate from the urn itself. To prevent further damage, the urn was temporarily removed, and the monument was cleaned. The Collections team is exploring options to conserve the porphyry urn and to create a replica of it. This initiative is in its early stages, and we look forward to sharing updates as the work progresses.