



# Rhododendron Festival

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Begin your tour with an introduction to **Charles Owen Dexter** at the **green sign** at the **entrance to the McGraw Family Garden of the Senses**. Dexter, a 60-year-old New Bedford textile manufacturer, purchased this land, known as **Shawme Farm**, in 1921. At the time, Dexter was ill and told by his doctor he had only a short time to live. He was advised to quit his job, relax, and enjoy life. Dexter followed this advice and spent time partaking in beloved hobbies. Amazingly, he ended up defying his doctors and living another 22 years! While also an accomplished violinist, photographer, and yachtsman, Dexter is best known for his work as an amateur horticulturist, most noted for the plants he created by hybridizing and propagating rhododendrons.

Dexter hybridized (or crossbred) native rhododendrons with Asian varieties, with the goal of creating plants with winter hardiness, vivid bright colors, fragrance, and big, beautiful blooms. Here, **behind the sign at the entrance to the McGraw Family Garden of the Senses**, two rhododendrons that perfectly exemplify Dexter's hybridization work can be seen: **'Dexter's Spice'** (with white flowers) and **'Dexter's Honeydew'** (with pink / orange flowers). Both 'Spice' and 'Honeydew' have large, showy blooms and offer a light and fruity fragrance. Learn more about these two plants from the green sign located here. Then, **continue to the left around the windmill** for your next stop.

## Self-Guided Tour

Welcome to the historic home of Charles Owen Dexter, best known for his work hybridizing rhododendrons on this property from 1921-43! **Follow the yellow pathway marked on the map and look for circular numbered signs that correspond with the "stops" on this tour.**

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Stop along the boardwalk area to see some unique hybrid rhododendrons and to read about Dexter's head gardener, **Tony Consolini**. One of Consolini's more renowned hybrids, **'Bellringer'**, can be seen just beyond the boardwalk. 'Bellringer' is unique in its white petal color, often described as having a blush of yellow. It also has a soft floral scent. Sometimes it is "shy to bloom" but it stands out among the pinks and reds of the surrounding Dexter hybrids.

After exploring the Garden of the Senses, **use the brick path at the bottom of the garden to access the lawn in front of the Administration Building** to learn more about Charles O. Dexter's life at Shawme Farm.



Charles Owen Dexter



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While today this building houses Heritage's administrative offices, the photograph on the sign here shows this building as **Dexter's home** during his ownership of Shawme Farm. While living here, Dexter created hundreds of thousands of rhododendrons.

Read the green sign and learn more about Dexter's reputation and life here on this property. When you are done, **follow the brick path back to the Garden of the Senses, turn left, and exit the garden**. Walk across the main pathway towards the **Flume Fountain** to see the foundations of **Dexter's greenhouse**.



The Dexter Estate in 1928.

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Look towards the **Flume Fountain** to see examples of various Dexter hybrids. While these plants surround the dramatic waterfall, we hope to show you something much more hidden! Look for the green sign showing Dexter's greenhouse as it stood during his tenure.

Behind the sign and tucked under the hollies, **you can find the foundation stones of the greenhouse.** Here is where Dexter propagated thousands and thousands of seedlings in an effort to create successful cultivars like his 'Scintillation.'

How did he do it? With lots of exacting work and patience! Learn more about the hybridization process and see many examples of it at your next stop.

From the **Flume Field**, wind your way along the main pathway, through the **hydrangea gardens**, past the **Parade Field and Special Exhibitions Gallery**, to the **Dexter Rhododendron Garden and Terrace**. Feel free to detour along one of the optional trails marked on the map (Stop #6 or #7 on this tour) on your way to the Dexter Garden and Terrace (Stop #5).

Thank you for visiting Heritage Museums & Gardens for our Rhododendron Festival!

Learn more at [www.heritagemuseums.org](http://www.heritagemuseums.org)

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Here at the **Dexter Rhododendron Terrace**, take a few minutes to read the interpretive panels about **this garden, Mr. Dexter, and his hybridization work.** As the panel indicates, this garden is the result of years of careful research and dogged sleuthing by a dedicated group of rhododendron enthusiasts, known as the Dexter Study Committee.

Just behind the interpretive panels, notice the bright pink blooms - these are '**Scintillation**,' the Dexter variety that is easiest to find at nurseries today. Check out the green sign nearby to learn more about this cultivar.

**Head down the wood-chipped path into this garden** where large specimens line the walkways, enveloping visitors with the sights and scents of our hybrid rhododendrons. The trails lead to a natural hollow and additional information on green signs about **rhododendron nomenclature and notable cultivars.**



The Dexter Greenhouse c. 1930s

**Bonus: Extend your tour by taking the trails found at Stop #6 and #7!**

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**The Cowles Woods Walk:** Located along the wood-chipped **trails near the Arbor Bowl**, highlighted in purple on the map, this area is home to a collection of unique rhododendron cultivars exhibiting the work of **Jack Cowles.** Cowles lived at Heritage (then known as the Dexter Estate) from 1957-67.

He was the horticulturist for Stanley Berns, the property owner during that time. Cowles' two main goals were to propagate, or make more of, the often finicky Dexter rhododendrons and to develop and build a hybridizing program based on the Dexter material. Cowles wanted to create smaller plants and plants with smaller leaves, as well as to continue the vivid colors that Dexter created. He was also responsible for the selection and naming of several noteworthy Dexter cultivars. Dexter's '**Appleblossom**,' '**Apricot**,' '**Brick Red**,' '**Cream**,' '**Giant Red**,' and '**Spice**' are just a handful of the cultivars named by Cowles, many of which you can see along this trail.

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**The Lake Walk:** take the wood-chipped **trail, highlighted in pink, from the Labyrinth to the Treehouse** (or vice versa) to enjoy the vistas and towering rhododendrons found along the banks of Shame Pond. Follow your nose to find **R. carolinianum** - a native (not hybridized) species that has an amazing scent. Behind the Treehouse, look for the large, Asian parent varieties used in hybridization by Dexter in his efforts to create larger and taller cultivars.