

COLUMNS

Connell Sanders: Don't miss Night Lights mania at New England Botanic Garden

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Last year, I was too late. The tickets were gone. Kaput. Spoken for. New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill's luminous landscapes lit up my social media feed all winter long, taunting me. Everyone but me had planned ahead.

The FAQ section on NEBG's website warned against scammers on the secondary market. I considered crashing a corporate Christmas party or convincing a family to put me on standby in case cousin Buster came down with a stomach bug. But, nothing worked. It was lights out.

The number one reason I recently became a verified fan (I mean, "member") of New England Botanic Garden was to lock in my Night Lights tickets. Our family is gearing up for a memorable evening in mid-December. We reserved a peak date two months in advance.

What is Night Lights? Only the hottest ticket in town. It has the works. Cider doughnuts, cocoa, s'mores, and seasonal drinks to burnish your inner flame. Altogether, the two indoor conservatories and 15 acres of formal gardens and woodlands take about three hours to explore. Or, so I've heard.

Imagine my delight when NEBG invited me to a "sneak peek" last week during the staff walk through. Finally, I had my chance. It was as if Taylor Swift herself rang me up. Enchanting. Gorgeous. Never in my wildest dreams. (Ah-ah, ha.) I was ready for it.

My husband, daughter and I bundled up and drove out to Boylston. We pulled into the parking lot just as the sun set on Wachusett Reservoir. Director of Horticulture Mark Richardson met us at the welcome center and then waited patiently while I insisted we embark on a paparazzi caliber photo shoot throughout the gardens.

Every space celebrated a unique ecosystem. I felt like Buddy the Elf, passing through the seven levels of the arctic court, traversing the swirly-twirly Limonaia sea, and skipping down the rainbow tunnel.

Night Lights will be on display from Friday, November 25 through Saturday, December 31 from 4pm–10pm. NEBG is closed on December 24 and December 25.

If, like me, you failed to land tickets to The Eras Tour last week, I urge you to save yourself the misery of missing out again. Even with increased parking capacity, a Night Lights sell out is expected. It's go time.