

## NEWS

# New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill lights up for the holidays



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WORCESTER — The annual New England Botanic Garden Night Lights display has become a holiday season tradition for many local families, helping to brighten up the shorter days and beat back the longer shadows.

This year's event, however, promises to be out of this world as the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill's team of horticulturists, gardeners and volunteers are quite literally reaching for the stars.

“Starry Skies” opens Friday night, bringing a galaxy theme to the garden in the form of cool blue lights interspersed with warm sunburst yellows and oranges (the sun is a star, after all). Light displays will be found throughout the various indoor and outdoor spaces including the ramble, Pliny's Allee, the orangerie, winter garden, the Limonaia, the court, the lawn garden and even the visitor's center.

“This was something we wanted to do for a while so getting to finally do it this year was great,” said horticulturist Isabella Bogdanski, one of the 16 staff members responsible for brainstorming each year's design.

“The biggest challenge was losing our lighting coordinator so it was all of us coming together to try and fill that gap this year,” said Bogdanski. “I just try to remember everything that she taught me and put my own twist on it, like, ‘What would April think of this?’ This needs more lights or I need to do this — that kind of thing.”

Bogdanski has especially been able to flex her creative muscle in the lawn garden, which will be taking on a sunset theme, gradually progressing from warmer to cooler colors. Near the cottage garden will begin with yellows and reds before making its way down to blue towards

the secret garden, which in turn will use the sphere lights acquired by the garden last year in a black hole theme.

The crowd favorite tunnel will also be returning.

“Tunnels are great. They’re interactive and people enjoy walking through them,” said Horticulture Director Mark Richardson.

Whereas last year there was a rainbow, the tunnel this year reflects the starry theme with icy blue lights.

“It’s a great Instagramable moment,” said Richardson. “Everyone loves taking a picture or snapping a video for an Instagram story as they’re walking through it.”

A smaller secondary tunnel was added this year and will be immediately visible by the entrance. Dubbed the “sunnell” it will directly contrast with the night theme of the larger tunnel, using yellow lights and wire sun rays to light up the night.

Almost every tree in the garden has a light fixture of some kind — either wrapped along its trunk and boughs or set up around its base to light it up from beneath. These “uplights” are fully programmable, able to run through a sequence of colors over the course of an evening and are ideal for trees that don’t lend themselves as well to the wire wrappings, Richardson explained.

The unique canvas offered by the garden flora makes designing each year a fun challenge, said Bogdanksi.

“It’s great just thinking of the theme for the garden and picturing all the little themes coming together and how you’re going to design it with the trees you have in the garden to work with,” she said.

“The whole thing is just magical at night,” said Richardson.

Until the end of the month, visitors may also stumble upon a bit of extra magic while checking out the lights. “Gnomevember” saw 40 gnomes, each decorated by a local artist, placed throughout the grounds.

“People are finding so much joy in trying to track down all the gnomes throughout the garden,” said public relations representative Liz Nye. Each one has a name and story along with a QR code to learn more about the artist.

Starry Skies opens officially Friday night and until then, the New England Botanic Garden team will be busy putting together the final touches for a project that has been in the works since September, but planned since last December.

That completion, more than any one light setup, is Bogdanksi's favorite part.

"Seeing everything come together, seeing the joy on people's faces as they come by visiting the gardens and getting excited for the holiday season," she said.