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PEOPLE AND GARDENS

January 13, 2025



BOYLSTON, MA, January 13, 2025 — [New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill](#) is thrilled to announce a transformative \$500,000 gift from George and Diantha Harrington of Kennebunk, Maine, in support of the Garden's [Frank L. Harrington Orchard](#). This extraordinary contribution will add to the Harrington Orchard endowment to ensure the preservation, care, and educational impact of this heirloom apple orchard for generations to come.

Located along the botanic garden's entry drive, the Harrington Orchard is a cherished feature that celebrates the region's rich agricultural history. It preserves a collection of 119 heirloom apple varieties in an orchard of 268 trees. Also known as heritage apples, heirloom varieties have been passed down over generations and are celebrated for their diversity of taste, color, texture, and size. The Garden's collection was founded during the Great Depression by Stearns Lothrop Davenport (1885–1973), a trustee of the Worcester County Horticultural Society (WCHS), the organization that operates New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. Representing a range of rare and historic apple varieties, the Harrington Orchard is both a living museum and an educational resource, connecting visitors to the art, science, and history of heirloom fruit cultivation.

“The Harrington Orchard has been a long-term family interest for our family,” said George Harrington. Frank L. Harrington, for whom the orchard is named, was George Harrington’s father and a long-time WCHS supporter. The Harrington family has a connection to Worcester County that dates back generations, with members serving in leadership roles within local government and cultural institutions. George Harrington’s uncle, H. Waite Hurlburt, served as WCHS president from 1979 to 1984. “With this gift, we hope to ensure the Orchard’s vitality and to inspire others to appreciate the deep history and scientific importance of heirloom fruit trees,” Harrington says.

The endowment supports long-term orchard care, including pruning, pest management, tree replacement, and interpretive programming. As apples cannot be preserved in a seedbank, maintaining living collections like the Harrington Orchard protects uncommon varieties from being lost. Thanks to recent collaborations with academic partners and other experts, the Harrington Orchard is emerging as a resource for advancing scientific knowledge of rare heirloom apple varieties and expanding public awareness about the importance of agricultural biodiversity.

“George and DD Harrington’s generosity is a testament to their dedication to the preservation of the living collection of this heirloom orchard,” said Grace Elton, CEO of New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. “Their gift ensures that the Harrington Orchard will continue to flourish, delight, and educate our community for decades to come.”

The Frank L. Harrington Orchard is a vital part of the Garden’s commitment to environmental stewardship and the protection of natural resources. To learn more, visit <https://nebg.org/orchard/>.

Photo Caption/Credit: Apple blossom blooms in the Frank L. Harrington Orchard at New England Botanic Garden / New England Botanic Garden, Megan Stouffer

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