

DONOR
IMPACT
REPORT
2025

**Guided by Conservation.
Inspired by Nature. Enriched by Culture.**



Our Role

Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) is the not-for-profit caretaker of 2,130+ acres of land and ecosystems surrounded by Canada's largest urban environment. It is an educator and experience creator delivering cultural, artistic and culinary experiences throughout its diverse network of gardens and natural spaces.

As a vibrant cultural hub and Centre of Excellence, we bring people together through programs, experiences and events that foster connection with nature and with one another. Grounded in conservation leadership, our work integrates biodiversity protection, climate action and inclusive cultural offerings, demonstrating how urban natural spaces can support ecological integrity while strengthening human connection.

In 2026, our work is focused through three core deliverables that drive meaningful engagement and lasting environmental impact.

1. Advance Biodiversity Protection and Habitat Restoration

Strengthen ecosystem health through invasive species management, landscape-scale habitat restoration, and recovery programs for species at risk. Support the re-establishment of ecologically and culturally significant plant communities to enhance biodiversity and long-term resilience.

2. Enhance Water Quality and Climate Resilience

Improve watershed and coastal ecosystem health through restoration, infrastructure adaptation, and collaborative action. Address erosion, stormwater impacts and climate-related risks while advancing low-carbon operations and contributing to regional water quality improvements.

3. Elevate Visitor Experience, Education and Partnerships

Enhance access, learning, and engagement through thoughtfully designed trail systems, inclusive programming, and integrated cultural knowledge. Expand partnerships and collaborative networks to strengthen conservation outcomes, support research and innovation and connect people to urban environmental stewardship.


1941 – Officially incorporated,
proudly marking over
85 years of service to the community


25,635
members

16,459
membership households


2,193
acres including
132 acres of
cultivated gardens
and an arboretum
2,061 acres of
nature sanctuaries


350,000
trail visitors


95,482
children discovered nature
and culture at RBG
75,125 through events,
programs and garden admission,
2,845 March Break and
Summer Camps campers,
17,458 school
program students
(938 classes!)

Our Mission

We dedicate our expertise in horticulture, conservation, science and education to connect people, plants and place for the purpose of nurturing and preserving healthy growing life on our planet.

Our Vision

A world in which everyone is awake to the beauty, diversity and necessity of plants.

Dear Friends,

Because of you, Royal Botanical Gardens is growing in ways that truly matter.

This past year was not simply a continuation of our work. It was a year of growth, imagination and meaningful progress. Your generosity, your engagement and your presence have shaped what we have been able to achieve and what we are becoming.

Whether you support RBG through philanthropy, partnership, grants or by spending time in our gardens, you play an essential role in sustaining and strengthening this remarkable place.

In 2025, we embraced new possibilities while strengthening the foundations that have sustained RBG for 85 years. The launch of our first-ever *Floral Showcase, Alice in Bloomland*, marked a bold step into immersive, story-driven experiences that welcomed new visitors and reenergized longtime members. It demonstrated that RBG can honour its horticultural excellence while evolving creatively, offering fresh reasons to visit and connect throughout the winter season. We were pleased to continue that spirit into 2026 with *Bloomland in Oz*, and we hope you had the opportunity to experience it and create new memories with us.

Throughout the year, you helped bring the gardens to life. From concerts under open skies to autumn traditions and winter celebrations, these experiences created moments of joy, reflection and connection. Families have created traditions. Children have discovered wonder in the natural world. People of all ages have found joy, renewal and a sense of belonging in the changing seasons. These shared experiences continue to shape RBG as a place where people and nature come together in meaningful ways.

Your generosity has also advanced essential work behind the scenes. Construction progressed on the new Iris Garden, a purpose-built space that will soon become the future home of our cherished collection. This investment reflects thoughtful stewardship, preserving botanical heritage while enhancing accessibility and the visitor experience.

Beyond the gardens, your support is protecting and restoring the natural landscapes under our care. Species at risk are being safeguarded. Wetlands and forests are being restored. Biodiversity is being strengthened through ongoing ecological monitoring and partnerships. Interns are gaining hands-on experience alongside our teams, contributing directly to conservation and ecological care while building the skills needed for the future. This work is often unseen, but its impact is lasting, and it is only possible because of your commitment to environmental stewardship.

You are also helping to inspire learning at every stage of life. Students are deepening their understanding of plants, science, and sustainability through school programs, workshops, camps and lifelong learning opportunities. These experiences nurture curiosity today and environmental responsibility tomorrow.

What defines this year most clearly is momentum. Vision is becoming reality. Plans are taking shape. More people are discovering RBG, while those who have long supported us are finding new ways to connect. Together, you are helping not only to sustain a treasured institution, but to ensure it continues to evolve and thrive.

Supporters fuel the careful stewardship of our lands. Visitors and members bring these spaces to life with curiosity and care. You make this place what it is.

On behalf of our Board, staff, volunteers and the landscapes and collections your generosity sustains, thank you. What grows here continues to inspire, protect and connect because of you.

And the next chapter is already growing.



With sincere appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Rowland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy Rowland
Chief Executive Officer, RBG

Centre of Excellence

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

CONSERVATION

Advancing the protection and restoration of biodiversity through conservation science and action.

 **821** native land plants and **11,283** aquatic plants planted to restore biodiversity across our sanctuaries

5 creek crossings reconstructed in Berry Tract to ensure safe, regular access

 **80** turtle nests protected, supporting the safe hatching of **1,365** turtles

50 ft. of elevated stairs installed on Ginger Valley Trail in Westdale, replacing degraded old stone steps

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Advancing understanding and impact through science communication and collaboration.

 **13** live presentations hosted, highlighted by the 2025 Colgan Lecture featuring Dr. Nadina Galle, who explored the intersecting crises of public health and climate change


 **8** researchers – projects from heat production in skunk cabbage, DNA sampling of endangered turtles to understanding contamination impacts on snail populations

Together with the **University of Waterloo**, **Smithsonian Institution** and **Canadian Food Inspection Agency** – identified a new insect species affecting endangered Red Mulberry trees at RBG

PRESERVATION

Living collections and natural heritage are being preserved for future generations.


 **247,485** living plants tended within our plant collections

 **151** plant species from the natural lands formally identified by herbarium staff

503 rare and endangered Iris cultivars stewarded and protected for future generations

 **66,264** plant specimens preserved in our herbarium
904 new specimens added

 **46** Canadian-bred rose cultivars – a growing celebration of national horticultural heritage

 Coordinated **5** partner organization's regional response to the emerging invasive species, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

With the **University of Guelph** – identified, documented and removed an invasive Magnolia species in our nature sanctuaries

Cultural Hub

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

EXPERIENCING THE GARDENS AND NATURAL SPACES

Audiences are choosing RBG as a place to gather and engage with culture in a nature-based setting.



462,751

visitors enjoyed our garden displays and experiences

50,000+

visitors attended RBG's fall and winter immersive garden experiences



350,000

nature trail visitors – Princess Point was the most popular access point



89,445 people attended the first-ever *Floral Showcase – Alice in Bloomland*

RBG is inspiring learning, curiosity and well-being through hands-on programs for children, students and adults.



2,845

March Break and Summer Camp campers



17,458

students learned in our school programs (938 classes!)

4,107

adults and children participated in experiential programs



3,579

students received subsidies through our Green Angels Program to attend school programs

RBG is a place where creativity, sustainability and local impact come together.



139,000 lb.

of Pumpkin Trail's squash, pumpkin, calabash and gourds were donated to

3 local farmers and

5 local foodbanks

13

local artisans and makers showcased their art in new *Winter Wonders* Artisan Village



5 Canadian artists/artist groups showcasing original custom works created for and featured in *Winter Wonders*



Exhibition of fibre artists from **6** countries featured in *Of Wonders Wild and New* alongside *Bloomland*.



Looking Ahead **Growing with Purpose**

Royal Botanical Gardens has always been a place of growth — of plants, of knowledge and of connection. Today, guided by our 25-Year Master Plan, we are growing with intention.

This plan is not simply about new gardens or redesigned spaces. It is about ensuring that RBG continues to lead in environmental stewardship while creating experiences that inspire and welcome connection. It reflects our dual role as a Centre of Excellence in urban environment and a Cultural Hub where people gather, learn and create lasting memories.

Because of your generosity, that vision is already taking shape.

At Hendrie Park, the development of the new Iris Garden marks an important milestone. Designed to become the future home of our admired iris collection, this purpose-built space will preserve a cherished horticultural legacy while making it more accessible and engaging for visitors when the collection moves in 2026. It represents thoughtful stewardship — honouring the past while preparing for the future.

At Laking Garden, early horticulture programming has laid the groundwork for Laking Farm — an inclusive outdoor learning environment rooted in sustainability and food growing. Children and youth are already getting their hands in the soil, learning where

food comes from and how ecosystems thrive. In the years ahead, this space will expand to serve schools, camps and lifelong learners.

Progress also continues on the Children’s Garden. With designs advancing, this future space will provide room for exploration, imagination and unstructured play in nature — helping nurture the next generation of environmental stewards.

Across every initiative, one question guides us: how will this deepen impact? How will it protect biodiversity, strengthen education and create meaningful experiences for those who walk through our gates?

Your support makes those answers possible.

As we approach our 85th anniversary, we are reminded that RBG has always evolved in partnership with its community.

The Master Plan is not just a blueprint for gardens — it is a commitment to care for this place and for the people who find belonging here, for decades to come.

**Together, we are cultivating
what grows next.**



Growing What Matters Most

Long before a child spots their first butterfly, before a student discovers a love of nature during a school visit, before a family gathers under autumn lights at Pumpkin Trail, someone chose to make that moment possible. At Royal Botanical Gardens, every flourishing garden and protected habitat carries the imprint of generosity. Behind the beauty is a community of people who believe this place matters.

Some give in response to a story that moves them. Others give quietly and consistently, month after month, ensuring the Gardens are cared for in every season. Their support tends the soil beneath the surface, sustaining trails, nurturing collections, protecting rare ecosystems and bringing arts, culture and immersive experiences to life. It helps fill our spaces with music, light, learning and celebration – welcoming families who return year after year to create traditions and lasting memories.

Some gifts allow RBG to think bigger. Through leadership support from individuals, families, corporations and foundations, conservation efforts deepen, learning opportunities expand and visitor experiences evolve in ways that inspire wonder. Together, these partners help power initiatives that strengthen both our natural landscapes and the communities who gather here.

Many supporters choose thoughtful pathways for their philanthropy, aligning their charitable vision with RBG's mission through Donor Advised Funds, family foundations or gifts of stock. And some make perhaps the most enduring commitment of all by including RBG in their estate plans.

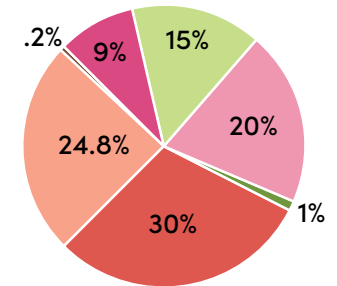
Each form of generosity reflects a shared belief in what RBG represents: protection, possibility and belonging.

Sponsors

We gratefully acknowledge our sponsors for their ongoing support and commitment. Although their contributions are not represented in the financial section of this report, their impact is felt across many aspects of our work. We truly value their partnership and the important role they play in helping us move our mission forward.

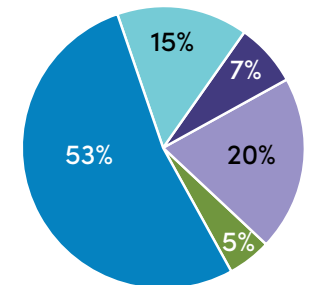
2025 Donor Support

Programs, events and experiences	\$276,295
Conservation	\$432,194
Gardens	\$596,662
Collection management	\$30,025
Unrestricted	\$883,134
Capital investment	\$733,870
Administration	\$4,757
Total	\$2,956,937



The chart above highlights how donor contributions were thoughtfully allocated to support RBG's mission. It reflects our commitment to transparency and demonstrates the meaningful impact each funding source has in sustaining our programs, preserving our collections, and enriching visitor experiences.

Programs, events and experiences	\$666,120
Conservation	\$186,025
Gardens	\$94,290
Capital investment	\$255,143
Administration and maintenance	\$59,976
Total	\$1,261,554



In addition to the generous support from our donors, RBG also receives support from several grant organizations. The chart above highlights the areas of impact that their contributions supported during 2025.

Note: Funds are not always raised and applied within the same fiscal year. Contributions may be received in advance of when they are needed, or designated for future use, ensuring stability and allowing RBG to plan thoughtfully for long-term priorities. As a result, the timing of when funds are received may differ from when they are ultimately used to support programs and initiatives.

For more detailed financial information about RBG in the 2025 fiscal year, please see our audited financial statements at <https://www.rbg.ca/about-us/annual-report/>

Growing Impact Green Angels Subsidies in Action

In 2025, the Green Angels program continued to remove financial barriers and open the gates of Royal Botanical Gardens to those who might not otherwise have access. As RBG's access program, Green Angels supports admission passes, school programming and transportation, camps, family programs, events, group tours, and virtual learning opportunities, ensuring that people of all ages can connect with nature regardless of their ability to pay.

Each number represents a moment of discovery, connection and belonging. The impact is best expressed by those who experienced it.

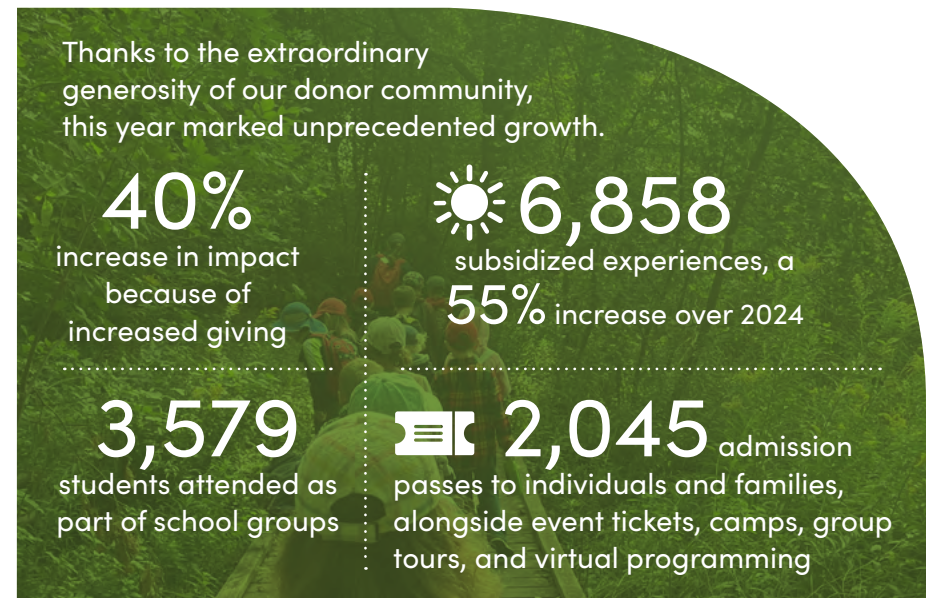
One Green Angels camp parent shared, "I can't thank you guys enough for this experience and for helping my daughter connect with the outdoors through this amazing camp program!"

A Mother's Day Brunch recipient described her visit as "a memorable celebration we will treasure forever."

Community partners echoed this gratitude. Good Shepherd noted that admission passes "allow the families to get out and have some fun together around our community", while the Eva Rothwell Centre affirmed that donor support would "help create memories for the families in our community." At Welcome Inn Community Centre, tickets provided "the perfect Christmas gift" and a first holiday experience in Canada for newcomer families.

Thanks to donors, just like you, thousands of individuals and families accessed meaningful experiences in the gardens and on trails across RBG in 2025.

Together, we are ensuring that nature truly belongs to everyone!



Patricia Isbister

Royal Botanical Gardens is honoured to recognize Patricia Isbister, a devoted member, generous donor and Founding Member of the Green Angels Program. Patricia joined RBG in 1987 with her husband, Dr. Earl Glen Isbister, and together they became passionate champions of the Gardens and its community impact.



In 2013, they provided vital start-up funding to help launch Green Angels, ensuring that individuals and families facing financial barriers could experience all that RBG has to offer. Patricia continued to support the program year after year, sustaining and growing its reach. Following her husband's passing, she further deepened her commitment by sponsoring Movie Night in Hendrie Park for five consecutive years, helping bring the community together while raising essential funds and awareness for Green Angels.

Patricia passed away in fall 2025. Her generosity and vision live on in the thousands of lives touched through Green Angels each year.



5th Annual Movie Night

Community generosity was on display at the 5th Annual Movie Night in Hendrie Park, A Green Angels Fundraiser, generously supported by Smith's Funeral Homes. Guests gathered to watch *The Wild Robot* and enjoy sunset views of Hendrie Park, lawn games, an educational pre-show featuring native wildlife artifacts. With complimentary popcorn in hand, it was a joyful celebration of nature, community and shared purpose for all.


300+
guests

\$13,000+
raised in support of
Green Angels



Powered by People

Highlights of volunteer contributions across gardens, trails, programs, events and conservation



38

teams of volunteers



514

RBG volunteers
(120 new in 2025)



227

corporate &
community
volunteers



46,620

volunteer hours
of service



5,432

hours contributed
by youth volunteers
at our camps



4,802

hours of outdoor
gardening efforts



31

languages
are spoken by
RBG volunteers



53 volunteers

completed more than
200 hours
of service each



33

volunteers who
have been volunteering
RBG for more than
20 years!



The Evolution of Volunteering at RBG

Since 1947, volunteers have been at the heart of Royal Botanical Gardens, shaping its programs, supporting its growth and enriching the visitor experience for generations. That year marked the founding of the Women's Committee – later known as the Auxiliary of RBG. In those early decades, volunteers focused their energy and creativity on a few key areas that quickly became beloved cornerstones of the Gardens. They nurtured young souls through the Children's Gardening Program, managed our gift shop and brought beauty and artistry to life through floral design. Their dedication helped establish RBG not only as a place of horticultural excellence, but as a vibrant community hub.



Nearly eight decades later, the spirit of service remains just as strong – only now it reaches further than ever before. In 2025, volunteers continue to support those original programs while also contributing across almost every aspect of RBG. They care passionately about the gardens and nature sanctuaries, support camps and special events, assist visitors throughout the year and work behind the scenes in our herbarium, library and archives, and with plant records. From planting and cataloguing to greeting and guiding, their contributions touch every corner of the organization.

Today, RBG's volunteer team is larger and more diverse than ever. In 2025 alone, volunteers contributed an extraordinary 46,620 hours of service. Each hour represents a shared commitment to conservation, horticulture, education and community – an enduring legacy that continues to grow and inspire, season after season.



Lyn Robinson



When Lyn Robinson stepped off a ship in Montreal in 1958, she knew no one in Canada. Armed with a medical degree from the University of London and a sense of adventure shaped by wartime England, she had come to Quebec to work as a family doctor for a year. That year became a lifetime.

Raised in England as a child of the Second World War, Lyn attended an all-girls school where she was encouraged to follow her talents. Thanks to government support, she completed medical school and soon after crossed the Atlantic. She quickly fell in love with Canada, and after completing her year in Québec, accepted a position at the General Hospital in Hamilton where she met her husband, John, and together they built a busy life, raising three children and balancing careers. Lyn joined a practice close to McMaster and found herself volunteering in support of the newly opened McMaster Medical School and other professional organizations.



Already an RBG member, Lyn was further drawn to RBG when she retired. She began volunteering in 1996 and is being celebrated for 30 years of service this year. What started as a simple desire to “get her hands dirty” soon grew into deep involvement. Within a year she was running the plant sale and shortly after became Auxiliary President. Over the decades Lyn



participated on the Past Presidents' Committee and with the plant sale, gardening information service, memorial watchers, visitor information and tour guides. Gardening, however, remained her favourite as it was “always interesting and a wonderful way to learn alongside friends.”

Lyn and John's commitment to the Gardens has extended beyond volunteer service. They have been generous supporters of RBG's first Medicinal Garden and, decades later, its renovation into the Healing Garden. They have also donated in support of the Rock Garden, helping ensure these special spaces continue to inspire, educate and restore visitors for generations to come.

Named RBG's Volunteer of Distinction in 2010, Lyn treasures the friendships she has formed most. She recalls a summer student once asking, “You're volunteering? You mean you do this for nothing?” Lyn smiles at the memory. It was never for nothing. It was for happiness, learning and connection. As she puts it, “I learned gardeners are really nice people.”

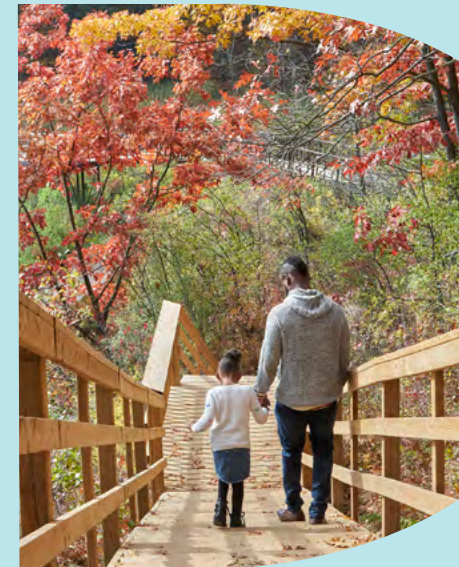
Membership Makes It Possible

At Royal Botanical Gardens, membership is more than a benefit, it is a commitment to sustaining nature, community, and discovery. For our members, it provides year-round access to 2,100 acres of breathtaking gardens and protected natural lands, and opportunities to experience each season in new and meaningful ways. For RBG, membership is an important and enduring source of support for the work that we do.

Last year, we were proud to welcome more than 4,000 new members who joined RBG's growing community of nature champions. We closed the year with more than 16,400 member households – representing nearly 26,000 individual members: a powerful reflection of our community's shared belief in protecting nature and nurturing meaningful connections to it.

Membership revenue provides dependable, renewable funding that allows us to plan boldly and invest responsibly, from maintaining our cultivated gardens and immersive trail systems, to advancing plant conservation and ecological restoration initiatives, to delivering hands-on education programs that inspire learners of all ages. Membership also offers meaningful daytime experiences throughout the year, inviting members to witness and enjoy the vibrancy of the spring and summer bloom periods, followed by the striking colours of autumn across our landscapes. This sustained support ensures that RBG remains both accessible and resilient, able to innovate through dynamic exhibitions and year-round programming while safeguarding the landscapes entrusted to our care.

To our members, and to those members who choose to deepen their impact through additional philanthropic support, thank you! Your commitment does more than open the gates. It strengthens conservation efforts, expands learning opportunities, and ensures that RBG continues to flourish as a place where people and nature thrive together, today and for generations to come.





Protecting Our Hemlocks

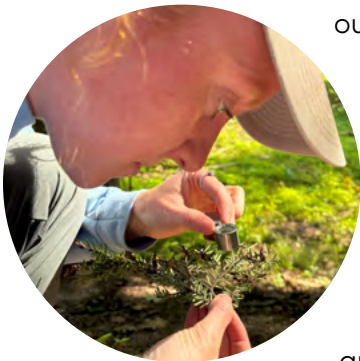
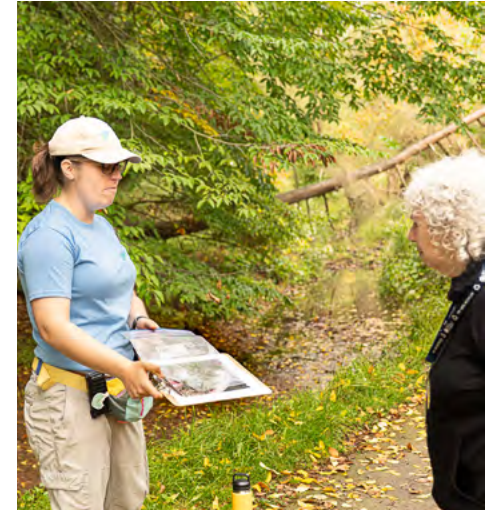
A Promise to the Future

Beneath the cool shade of RBG's south shore trails, Eastern Hemlocks stand as quiet giants. Often called the "Redwood of the East," these trees can live for more than a thousand years, their sweeping branches creating a living canopy that cools the forest floor, shelters wildlife, stabilizes creek banks and purifies the air we breathe. They are more than trees — they are anchors of an entire ecosystem.

In recent years, that canopy has come under threat. The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA), a tiny invasive insect first confirmed at RBG in 2023, feeds on Eastern Hemlocks and drains them of vital nutrients. If left unmanaged, it can devastate mature trees in just a few short years. The stakes are high, not only for the trees themselves, but for the forests and waterways they protect.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, RBG has responded swiftly and strategically. Our team undertook the enormous task of inventorying and mapping more than 1,400 hemlock trees across





our natural lands. Healthy trees are now treated with TreeAzin, a systemic treatment administered by certified arborists in spring and fall to slow the spread of infestation and protect vulnerable stands. Each tree is carefully tagged and monitored, creating a living record of stewardship and ensuring that every intervention is guided by data and long-term planning.

This critical work was further strengthened in 2025 through funding from the Invasive Species Centre’s Transformative Action Grant, enabling expanded treatment efforts and reinforcing RBG’s leadership in managing emerging invasive threats.

Earlier this year, donors were invited into the forest for a behind-the-scenes tour, an opportunity to witness this work firsthand. Standing beneath towering trunks, participants learned how staff identify infestations, measure tree health and carefully administer treatments. Seeing the impact up close transformed the issue from an abstract threat into an urgent call to action.

For donor Kate Latange, the experience was deeply moving. Surrounded by these ancient trees and understanding what was at risk, she felt inspired to step forward in support of their protection – a powerful reminder that connection to nature often leads to meaningful action. “The connection my family and I have to RBG, and in particular this collection of Eastern Hemlocks, began when I was very young, over 50 years ago and has continued through to my children. For my husband, Andrew, and I, making a donation to support RBG and the team honours the dedication RBG has to preserving this area’s special and unique ecosystem.”

Protecting our hemlocks is not a one-season effort. It is a long-term promise to preserve biodiversity, safeguard our tree canopy, and ensure that future generations can walk shaded trails beneath healthy, thriving forests.

Because of you and donors like Kate (left) and Andrew (third from left), that promise is taking root.



Growing Together

Investing in the Future of Children's Programming

For over 75 years, RBG's education programs have been a place for kids in our community to learn, grow and connect with nature. Our year-round programs spark countless "aha!" moments for children and youth through school field trips, camps and extra-curricular programs.

As our communities grow, so does the demand for high-quality nature education. Ask local parents or teachers and they will tell you that RBG programs often sell out – fast!

RBG's Education team has worked tirelessly to meet this growing community need. We've introduced virtual options, made full use of all learning spaces and increased our staff capacity. At the same time, we remain committed to accessibility by reserving program spaces for children supported through our Green Angels Subsidy Program.

Planting the Seeds of Growth

In 2025, RBG embarked on a transformative new chapter in children's programming. With generous support from individual donors and a \$570,200 investment from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we began reimagining Laking Garden as Laking Farm – a dynamic outdoor learning environment dedicated to horticulture-focused, hands-on education. Community and Foundation support allows us to invest in essential infrastructure including garden beds, seeds and bulbs, educational tools and accessible design elements that ensure all children can participate fully.



The first Laking Farm pilot program launched in fall 2025, with school groups learning to plant garlic while exploring themes of food systems and seasonal cycles. In 2026, programming will expand to topics such as soil science, sustainable growing practices and food literacy. This summer will also mark the debut of Veggie Camp, where young campers will plant, tend and harvest vegetables – culminating in a joyful mini-market that invites families to celebrate each child's accomplishments and the site's history as a market garden.

Growing Forward

The vision for Laking Farm extends well beyond its first year. By 2028, Laking Farm will

3 new
science education
programs for 2026 –
climate change,
wetlands and
growing plants
in space



welcome learners of all ages and backgrounds, with a focus on inclusive and culturally diverse programming that reflects our community. Programs introduce children to career pathways in horticulture, sustainable agriculture, environmental science and food systems, while also building skills in teamwork and leadership. Through hands-on growing and a child-run market, participants explore entrepreneurship and the real-world work behind farming and local food production.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Ontario Trillium Foundation and to every individual donor who is helping RBG expand and strengthen children's programming. Your generosity is cultivating the next generation of environmental stewards and ensuring that countless children continue to experience the joy, wonder and discovery that only nature can inspire.



The Language of Nature / Le Langage de la Nature

We are delighted to share that more than 700 children and youth participated in French-language education program throughout 2025, reflecting RBG's deepening commitment to serving the Francophone community across our region.

To meet the growing demand from French-language schools and families, RBG invested in meaningful program enhancements over the past year. We hired three bilingual educators, expanded our collection of French-language classroom materials and undertook significant curriculum translation. We also introduced an entirely new program created specifically for Francophone learners: Le Langage de la Nature (The Language of Nature), offering students an immersive, culturally responsive learning experience.

We are grateful to the Ministry of Francophone Affairs for helping RBG remove barriers, broaden access and create enriching, high-quality learning opportunities for Francophone children and youth across our community.

Breaking the Waves at Spencer Creek

A Restoration Success Story

In 2025, Royal Botanical Gardens continued an important chapter in the restoration of Cootes Paradise with focused work at the mouth of Spencer Creek. Under the leadership of Jennifer Bowman, senior aquatic ecologist, staff and volunteers extended 175 metres of restorative berm and prepared three new planting cells that will be planted in 2026. Their efforts reflect RBG's longstanding commitment to practical, nature-based restoration that brings measurable benefits to the marsh.



Spencer Creek plays an outsized role in the health of Cootes Paradise. As the largest watershed feeding into the marsh, it carries significant sediment and pollutants from surrounding communities. Improving this single creek channel has a meaningful ripple effect on the entire wetland. By rebuilding the natural flow of the creek, the project helps direct water deeper into the marsh, easing pressure on sensitive shorelines and supporting healthier aquatic conditions.

The techniques used are thoughtful, effective and grounded in ecological understanding. Wooden stakes, filled with donated Christmas trees, form natural structures that break up waves and



create calm pockets of water — ideal conditions for new wetland plants to take hold. Adapted from successful work in Grindstone Creek, this method helps protect young plantings from erosion and browsing wildlife. Once established, species like cattails and bulrushes will naturally filter sediment and pollutants, improving water quality over time.

This year's progress represents more than just physical changes to the landscape. It reflects the dedication of the team, the value of community partnership, and the ongoing commitment to caring for one of Canada's most significant wetlands. With continued donor support, the new planting areas in 2026 will help Cootes Paradise grow stronger, healthier, and more resilient—for wildlife and for the many people who treasure this place.

We are grateful to the many individual donors and the following funders for supporting wetland restoration at RBG including:

- Canada Water Agency
- Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
- Fidelity Investments Canada
- ArcelorMittal Dofasco
- TAKLA Foundation
- The Norman and Margaret Jewison Foundation
- The Ted and Karin Bossence Fund at Hamilton Community Foundation

Fostering the Next Generation of Ecologists

Every year, interns and summer students join the RBG team to support our aquatic, terrestrial and species-at-risk stewardship and restoration work while gaining valuable on-the-ground experience in their fields. Meet Taylor, Ada and Reilly, who joined us in 2025.



Taylor Groothuis
Aquatic Ecologist
Intern

“I had the opportunity to work as an aquatic intern and gained invaluable hands-on experience in aquatic and terrestrial restoration, invasive species management and a variety of other environmental field projects.

The internship provided a strong foundation in practical environmental skills and significantly expanded my understanding of aquatic ecosystems and conservation practices. I am deeply grateful for the guidance and mentorship provided by the senior ecologists, whose leadership, expertise and support created an exceptional learning environment.”

Students and internships are generously supported by HOPA, Pat and Peter Elliott, Fidelity Investments Canada, ArcelorMittal Dofasco and the Canada Water Agency.



Ada Cooke-Baskier
Species-at-Risk
Intern

“My time as the species-at-risk intern has really expanded my knowledge base beyond what I could have possibly anticipated.

I learned so much about turtle care and hatchling husbandry, tree health assessments and species-at-risk legislation. The intern position was exciting, challenging and incredibly fulfilling: the work I was doing to protect and conserve species-at-risk at RBG filled me with a real sense of purpose.

The hands-on experience I gained in this position was not only fun and engaging, but will definitely help broaden my career possibilities. I couldn't have asked for a more welcoming work environment with the Natural Lands team.”



Reilly Smith
Terrestrial
Intern

“This internship has truly been the most fun I've ever had at a job. It can be tough landing a position in this field, so I am extremely grateful that RBG offers this opportunity and that I was able to be a part of the amazing work taking place here.

As the terrestrial intern, I was able to learn many valuable skills involved in restoration, conservation, monitoring and working with the amazing volunteers. Through planting native trees and shrubs, learning bird calls, counting butterflies, surveying invasive pests, collecting data and more – the transferable skills I gained are endless.

This position opened my eyes to the many valuable plant and animal species in the Hamilton and Burlington area that rely on the work RBG does. It feels good to contribute to something that not only benefits myself but the many other species and ecosystems we're all connected too.”

The Great Pumpkin Trail

From Celebration to Community Impact

Each fall, the Great Pumpkin Trail transforms the woodlands in Hendrie Park into a glowing celebration of community. More than a seasonal event, it has become one of RBG's signature traditions – an experience that brings families, friends and neighbours together in shared delight.

This year, 17,500 visitors of all ages and backgrounds walked the 1.5-kilometre forest trail, illuminated solely by the warm glow of pumpkins. Children arrived in their favourite Halloween costumes, parents carried little ones along jack-o-lantern-lit paths, and laughter echoed through the trees. For many, it is a cherished ritual – an evening of wonder that marks the changing season and creates lasting family memories.

The scale of the event reflects both its popularity and its purpose. More than 15,000 pumpkins, squash, and gourds were arranged in imaginative displays throughout the Gardens, while 700 carved jack-o'-lanterns lit the path along Pumpkin Trail.

But the impact does not end when the candles are extinguished. In keeping with RBG's commitment to sustainability and community care, pumpkins were collected after the event and redistributed to local food banks or provided to livestock at nearby farms. This circular approach reduced waste and extended the impact far beyond the garden gates.

The Great Pumpkin Trail is a celebration of light, connection and stewardship. With donor support, events like this continue to strengthen community bonds while reflecting the values that guide RBG – creativity, sustainability and care for one another.

Corporate Carving

We extend heartfelt thanks to the incredible corporate groups who generously volunteered their time and creativity to carve pumpkins for the Great Pumpkin Trail: Boehringer Ingelheim (Canada) Ltd., Brownlow Partners, Findlay Lawyers, Hilti Canada, IKEA Burlington and Entente District 15 (formerly RTO).

You brought enthusiasm, positivity and community spirit to this beloved annual carving event, and your participation helped transform the trail into a magical autumn experience for the thousands of families that visited.

Many thanks to IKEA Burlington for donating the candles to light our way!



Curiosity in Action

At the Royal Botanical Gardens, curiosity is cultivated every day.

Throughout the year, Discovery Stations pop up in the Mediterranean Garden and Hendrie Park, inviting visitors of all ages to pause, observe and ask questions. Station themes reflect what is unfolding in the gardens at that moment – roses in bloom, pollinators at work, citrus varieties ripening or birds moving through the landscape. These informal learning experiences spark conversation, deepen understanding and transform a simple visit into a moment of discovery. In 2025, the program was supported by 31 dedicated volunteers and resulted in more than 3,000 meaningful community engagements.

For families eager to continue exploring beyond the stations, Exploration Backpacks offer another way to learn together. Available from the Information Cabin, each backpack is filled with hands-on tools and guided activities that encourage children and caregivers to slow down, observe closely and engage with nature in new ways. These self-guided experiences make learning approachable and joyful, helping more families feel confident exploring the gardens on their own.



The Estate of Ingrid Dancov

In early 2025, Ingrid Dancov left a Legacy Gift that continues to make a lasting impact at RBG. A dedicated volunteer since 2017, Ingrid generously shared her time with the floral workshop team, supported weddings and served as a propagation volunteer in horticulture. She was known for her warmth, kindness and deep love for the Gardens.

Through an undesignated bequest supporting RBG's greatest needs, Ingrid's legacy now helps sustain programs like Discovery Stations and Exploration Backpacks – ensuring that future generations experience the same sense of curiosity and connection she cherished.



Together, Discovery Stations and Exploration Backpacks extend learning beyond classrooms and into the landscape itself. They create accessible, nature-based learning opportunities and everyday moments of curiosity and connection that stay with visitors long after their visit ends.

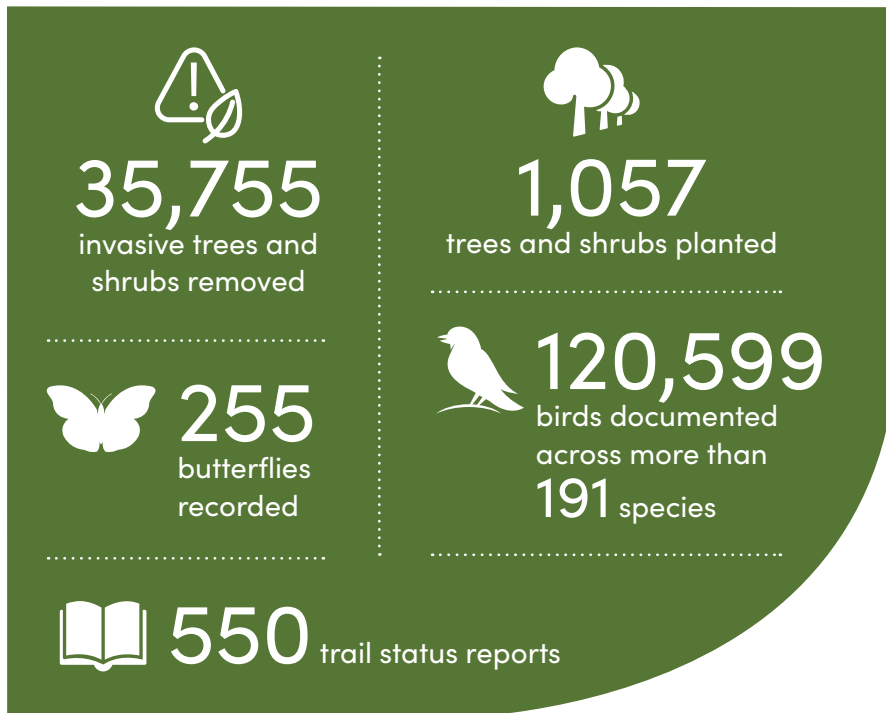
A Letter to Terrestrial Ecology Supporters at RBG

Dear Supporters,

On behalf of the Natural Lands Terrestrial Ecology team, thank you for your support throughout 2025. Your dedication to protecting and restoring our nature sanctuaries continues to make a measurable and lasting impact.

In 2025 alone, our team removed an impressive 35,755 invasive trees and shrubs from our protected areas, directly improving habitat health and giving native species the space they need to thrive. In our nature sanctuaries we also planted 1,057 trees and shrubs as part of our reforestation efforts — an investment that will benefit this ecosystem for generations.

Our contributions to monitoring and citizen science were equally impactful. During the annual Butterfly Count, our team recorded 255 detections, providing valuable insight into the health of our pollinator populations. RBG's Bird Census documented 120,599 birds across more than 191 species — an extraordinary achievement that strengthens our long-term conservation data. Meanwhile, our staff and volunteer team completed and responded to over 550 status reports on our trails to ensure that visitors to our trails and our sensitive natural areas were protected.





Beyond the numbers, we are especially grateful for the knowledge and passion that our volunteers, visitors and donors have for our work and this critical habitat. The relationships we build together – rooted in shared purpose and a respect for the preservation and restoration of biodiversity – inspires us and drives us to accomplish more in our work each day.

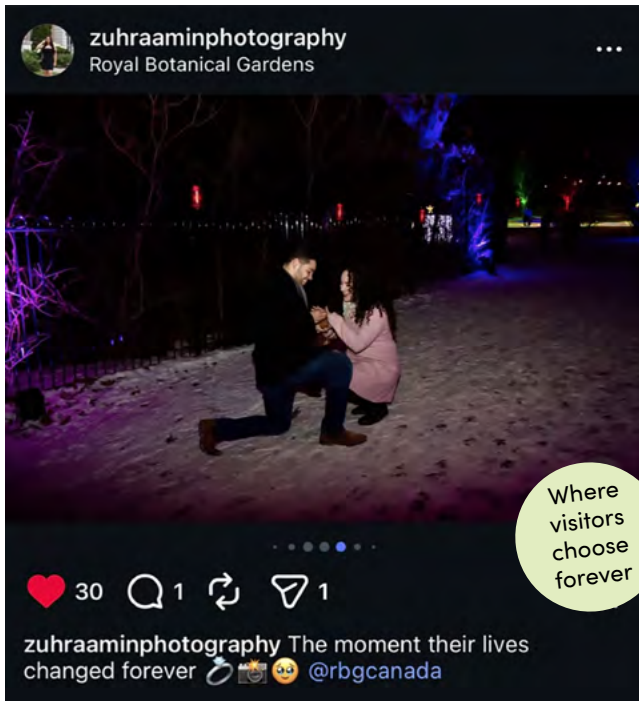
Every tree planted, invasive shrub removed, species counted and partnership made a positive and tangible impact on our lands and we are deeply grateful for your passion, commitment and support.

Thank you for making 2025 such a remarkable year for terrestrial conservation at RBG.

With sincere appreciation,
Mallory, Lindsay, William + Tys

More Than a Venue

Human Connections Are Made at Royal Botanical Gardens



Where visitors choose forever

For generations, the Gardens have been a place where family traditions are formed and milestones are celebrated, where everyone belongs. For many in the region, RBG is a place they return to again and again at different stages of life, weaving it into their personal histories. From childhood family outings and school trips to reconnecting later with their own children or grandchildren, RBG becomes part of a family's story – shared across decades.

Here, life's defining moments unfold. Engagements, weddings and anniversaries are celebrated among the blooms. RBG is the kind of place that inspires love stories not only as a romantic backdrop, but as a spot where connections truly begin. Some of our volunteers have met while giving their time to the Gardens and later married – while many couples who volunteer together say that sharing time at RBG brings joy and meaning to their relationships.



Couples who volunteer together...



Where visitors connect through experience

Season after season, the Gardens create opportunities for families to gather and build traditions they can return to year after year. Beloved annual experiences like Winter Wonders, Alice in Bloomland, Enchanted and the Great Pumpkin Trail bring the community together in celebration. Visitors young and old step into the magic – dressing as the Mad Hatter, donning fairy wings or wearing favourite Halloween costumes – fully present in the moment. These experiences become treasured rituals, remembered in family photo albums.

Beyond special events, RBG is where everyday connections deepen. It's where grandparents share stories on shaded benches, where parents watch their children discover pollinators for the first time, and where laughter echoes along winding paths. Children who once explored these gardens grow up and return with families of their own, continuing a legacy of curiosity, care and belonging.

These meaningful experiences are nurtured through careful stewardship of RBG's landscapes, programs and the people who help make the Gardens thrive. Here we create space for families to connect with nature and with one another.



Where two people choose forever



A moment of recognition, shared with those who matter most



Where visitors build memories and family traditions together

Investing in Resilience

Stewarding a Living Landscape at the Arboretum



Spring at the Arboretum is a living work of art, a gentle welcome to the season of growth. Blooming cherries, magnolias, crabapples and redbuds sweep the lawns and rolling slopes with shifting hues, creating an enchanting visual tapestry. Rustling leaves, birdsong, rich fragrance and the first real warmth of the season, weave together to create the perfect setting for an easy stroll or a tranquil picnic.

For decades, the Arboretum has been a place of quiet enjoyment and connection. With support from our donors, RBG's Horticulture team works thoughtfully to ensure that this beloved landscape endures for generations to come.





Resilience and sustainability continue to guide our horticultural care. Over the past year, this philosophy came to life at the Arboretum through several important initiatives:

- Planting 60 new lilacs, propagated on-site, to enhance the spring bloom season while strengthening succession planting and helping preserve rare cultivars.
- Reinvigorating lilac soil with a customized, nutrient-rich soil mix formulated to support stronger plants that are more resistant to disease, pests, heat and drought
- Rewilding areas of turf under trees by limiting mowing and allowing grass to grow tall, creating a cooler microclimate and increasing biodiversity of native plants, pollinators and other wildlife.
- Restoring the forest edge with the help of volunteers by removing invasive species and replanting native shrubs to create a healthier transition between cultivated and natural areas.

Together, these efforts support our long-term vision for the Arboretum – a place of quiet resilience where visitor experience, horticultural heritage and natural biodiversity remain in balance.

We are profoundly grateful to Cliff Carson for sustaining the Toni Carson Shrub Collection and to the Holdbest Foundation for their leadership as supporters of the Arboretum Living Landscape Fund.



The Portal: The World We See

Donated by Dan Lawrie as a continuation of The Dan Lawrie International Sculpture Collection at RBG, *The Portal: The World We See* stands as a striking new feature at the entrance to the new Iris Garden. Purchased through Oeno Gallery in Prince Edward County, the sculpture strengthens the dialogue between art, landscape and philanthropy within Hendrie Park.

Born in Belleville, Ontario, Jeff Gillmor has worked with metal for more than 35 years. A self-taught artist, he discovered his passion while studying

Economics at the University of Waterloo. His practice reflects a deep respect for material and form, allowing steel to feel both monumental and contemplative. Framing the clean sightlines and structured elegance of the new garden, *The Portal* focuses the viewer's attention while complementing the nearby sculpture Bloodroot.

While its scale creates a dramatic threshold, the sculpture also offers an intimate surprise: step inside, and its curved steel walls produce a gentle echo, an unexpected moment of reflection within the garden experience.



Gillmor describes the work as a meditation on perspective: "The World we see and live in is much more complex than I feel it has to be, so we need to keep (everything) in perspective, keep basic positive values ... as we pass through the circle of life."

Supporting Accessibility at RBG Removing Barriers, Creating Belonging

Accessibility is not simply about infrastructure. It is about independence, dignity and ensuring that every person who visits Royal Botanical Gardens can move through our spaces with confidence.

In 2025, RBG advanced several meaningful accessibility enhancements across our gardens, facilities and digital platforms. While these improvements may appear practical, their impact is deeply personal.

A major modernization of RBG's website improved readability, simplified navigation, and strengthened compatibility with assistive technologies. A new interactive map now offers live updates and clearly identifies accessible routes and features, helping visitors plan their experience before they arrive. For many guests, this preparation removes uncertainty and makes a visit feel welcoming from the very first click. This work was made possible with support from:



An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Across our properties, pathway and trail enhancements improved safe passage and rest opportunities on frequently used routes.

Trails at Rock Chapel were widened and the Woodland Garden Boardwalk at Hendrie Park was repaired. New benches were added to the Arboretum, sparked by a heartfelt conversation with a donor whose friend was having trouble hiking the trails. With support from the Ministry of Infrastructure and private donors, these improvements provide safer footing, better flow and places to rest and reflect.



6 trails

had accessibility improvements in line with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Inside RBG Centre, aging tile and carpet flooring were replaced with commercial-grade vinyl to reduce tripping hazards and improve mobility for visitors using wheelchairs and walkers. A new sloped transition at the auditorium exit to Royal Court further supports barrier-free movement.



In Hendrie Park, the new Iris Garden pathways were completed with a permeable material that brings together the best of accessible and sustainable design approaches. These enhancements were made possible with funding from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.



Together, these projects reflect an ongoing commitment to embed accessibility into every aspect of the RBG experience. As a public garden and cultural hub, RBG is dedicated to ensuring that physical, digital and environmental barriers do not prevent participation.

Accessibility is not an add-on. It is foundational to creating a place where everyone feels they belong.

Royal Botanical Gardens

RBG Centre

RBG Centre is home to many special programs and events where you will find both indoor and outdoor displays, Shop at the Gardens gift shop and the Greenhouse Café, along with our administrative offices.

THE BREEZEWAY

Peak interest: All year

The Breezeway brightens winter with various spring-flowering shrubs and trees and a wide range of common and exotic bulbs that evoke a fragrant spring day. Our talented gardeners change the space with a variety of themes throughout the year, culminating in a holiday season show of poinsettia and winter greens.

MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN

Peak interest: All year

The Mediterranean Garden's rejuvenation project has flourished, transforming the space into a botanical dream with new plant arrivals that added depth and diversity to the collection. Step into the Mediterranean Garden at RBG and you'll find yourself immersed in a world of beauty, tranquillity and transformation. Originally opened in 1986 as a quiet conservatory, this beloved space has been revitalized into a breathtaking sanctuary – an evolving display of art, nature and imagination. Through the changing seasons, it continues to inspire wonder and reflection.

Hendrie Park

Hendrie Park, our largest cultivated garden area, offers something for everyone, showcasing the remarkable diversity of both plants and garden design. This vibrant space is home to the Dan Lawrie International Sculpture Collection, Morrison Woodland Garden, Scented Garden, Healing Garden, Helen M. Kippax Garden, Prehistoric Grove, Veggie Village and the Tea House at the Turner Pavilion. Adding to its beauty, the sustainable Rose Garden presents a stunning display of cold-hardy roses and companion plants that provide seasonal interest throughout the year.

Laking Farm

Laking Farm is a bold and transformative initiative at Royal Botanical Gardens. It will serve as a dynamic space of hands-on learning and teaching where children, youth, families and educators will come together to explore the connections between food, ecology and community. Reimagined as a vibrant working landscape, the Farm will foster environmental learning and food literacy through immersive, curriculum-connected programs and meaningful public engagement, including a dedicated children's garden program.

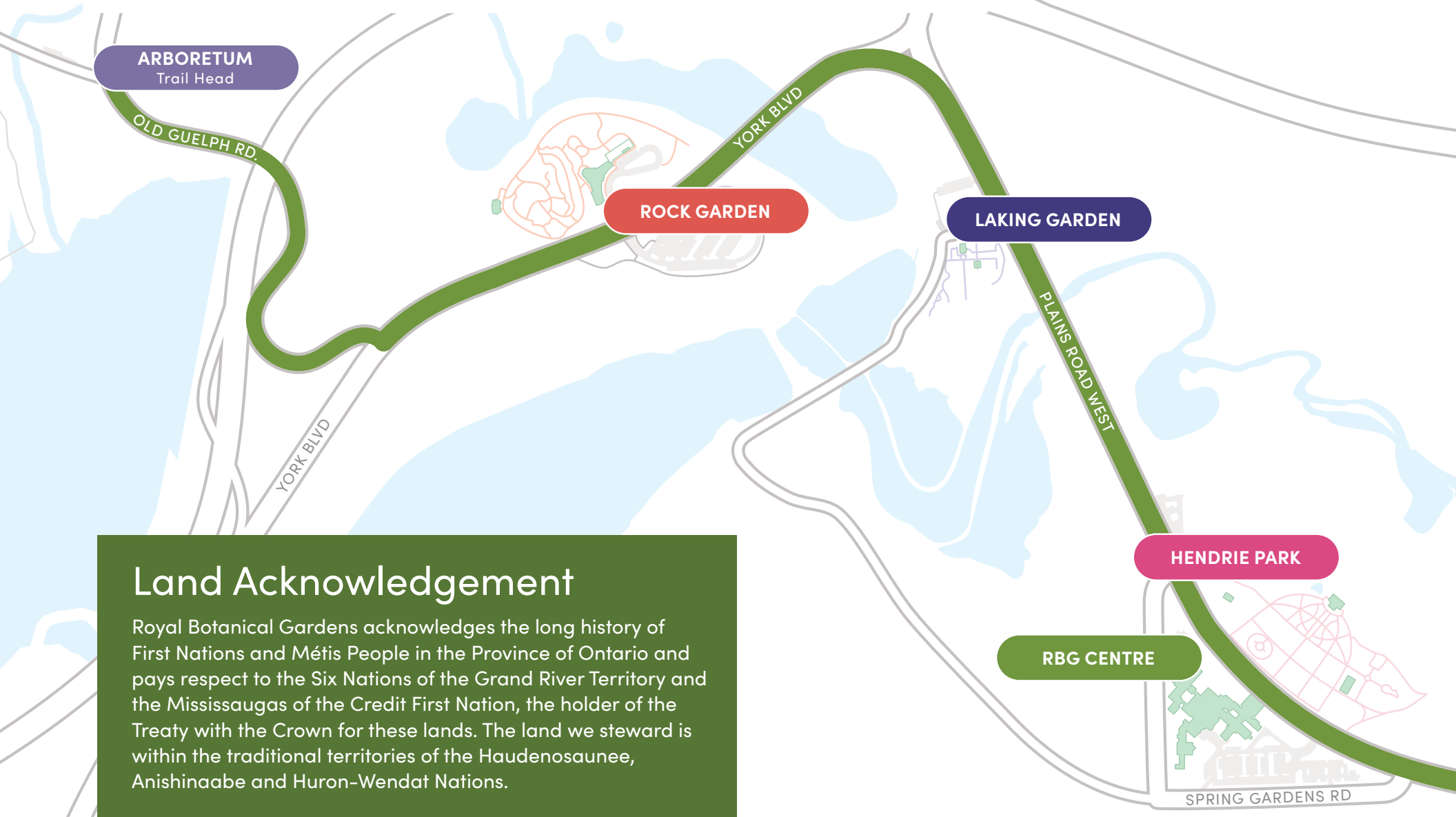
Rock Garden

Opened to visitors in 1932, the historic Rock Garden is considered the birthplace of Royal Botanical Gardens. Following a significant rejuvenation, the David Braley & Nancy Gordon Rock Garden reopened in 2016 to embrace sustainable trends in garden design and management while respecting the integrity of its heritage setting. Bold swaths of brilliant perennials provide sweeps of inspiring colour and texture throughout all seasons.

Arboretum

RBG's Arboretum resembles an English landscape park rather than a traditional garden, offering a stunning display of trees and woody plants up close. Particularly beautiful in spring and fall, it features over 500 species and cultivars of lilacs, along with extensive collections of magnolias, crabapples, dogwood, redbud and cherry trees, as well as other unique trees and shrubs. Visitors can explore nature trails that highlight native plants used by Indigenous peoples while enjoying breathtaking views of the shoreline and forests of Cootes Paradise.

As Canada's biodiversity hotspot and a vibrant part of the community, Royal Botanical Gardens provides a one-of-a-kind experience, harmonizing cultivated gardens and sweeping natural landscapes with engaging programs in history, culture, science, recreation and natural beauty.



Land Acknowledgement

Royal Botanical Gardens acknowledges the long history of First Nations and Métis People in the Province of Ontario and pays respect to the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the holder of the Treaty with the Crown for these lands. The land we steward is within the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Huron-Wendat Nations.

Thank you
for making
an impact



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