

Centre County in Bloom

Associates of Scott Arboretum & Gardens Trip

May 11–13, 2026

Led by Jeff Jabco and Mackenzie Knight-Fochs

Transportation will be with Starr Charter, departing from Swarthmore. Information will be sent to participants on where to leave cars for the duration of the trip; carpooling is strongly encouraged.

Your guides for this trip:

Jeff Jabco, Executive Director of Scott Arboretum & Gardens, has helped lead many trips for Scott Arboretum & Gardens, day trips for Longwood Gardens, weekend trips to Chicago for Swarthmore College Alumni, and several international trips for the International Clematis Society. Centre County is special to Jeff because he grew up in Bellefonte and graduated from Penn State University with a degree in horticulture. Jeff will be our hometown guide to the PSU campus, his home town of Bellefonte, as well as some of the hidden gems and natural areas. The area is growing, but there still is a quiet, hidden, secret quality of life in "Happy Valley."

Mackenzie Knight-Fochs is the Education Programs Manager of Scott Arboretum & Gardens. She has led and supported day trips when she worked at Delaware Center for Horticulture, Laurel Hill Cemetery, and here at Scott Arboretum & Gardens, both as an intern under Julie Jenney and in her current role. She has also supported a multi-day trip to Virginia for members of the Delaware Center for Horticulture and traveled with groups domestically and abroad.



Schedule at a Glance

Monday, May 11

Time	Activity	Details
7:00 am	Depart Scott Arboretum & Gardens	One rest stop en route
9:30 am	Arrive at The Bower, Native Plant and Landscape Park	Guided tour + explore independently
11:15 am	Depart for the Chows' Garden	Lunch on the bus Rest stop on the way
1:15 pm	Arrive at Franklin & Angela Chow's Garden	Tree peony tour
3:30 pm	Depart the Chows'	—
3:45 pm	Check in	Nittany Lion Inn
5:00 pm	Depart for Big Spring Spirits	Bellefont, PA
5:30–8:30 pm	Big Spring Spirits	Tour, spirits tasting, buffet dinner
9:00 pm	Return to Inn	Evening free
Meals Included	Lunch; Spirits tasting, One cocktail, Dinner	

Tuesday, May 12

Time	Activity	Details
8:15 am	Penn State Campus Tour	Optional guided walking tour
10:00 am	Depart for Research Center	Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center (Rock Springs)
10:30 am – 1:30 pm	Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center (Rock Springs)	Tours and BBQ Lunch
1:30 pm	Depart for Inn	—
2:00 pm	Arrive at Inn	Short break
3:00 pm	Depart for The Arboretum at Penn State	—
3:30–6:15 pm	The Arboretum at Penn State	Guided tours + explore independently
6:15–8:00 pm	Cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, dinner	The Arboretum at Penn State
8:00–8:20 pm	Desserts and sunset at the Overlook Pavilion	The Arboretum at Penn State
8:30 pm	Return to Inn	Evening free
Meals Included	Lunch; Dinner, cocktail, wine, and beer	

Wednesday, May 13

Time	Activity	Details
8:00 am	Load bus	Load all luggage
8:30 am	Depart for Orchard	Hybrid Chestnut Seed Orchard
9:00–10:00 am	Hybrid Chestnut Seed Orchard	Tour
10:00 am	Depart for Museum	Palmer Museum of Art
10:15–11:00 am	Palmer Museum of Art	Explore galleries independently
11:15 am	Pick up lunch	Bonfatto's in Bellefonte
11:45 am – 1:30 pm	Spring Creek Canyon	Lunch + walk
1:30 pm	Depart for Creamery	—
1:45–2:30 pm	Penn State Berkey Creamery	Ice cream (on your own)
2:30 pm	Depart for Scott Arboretum & Gardens	Rest stop en route
6:45 pm	Arrive in Swarthmore	End of trip
Meals Included	Lunch	

Note: Breakfasts are on your own and we will provide suggestions both at The Nittany Lion Inn and surrounding area.

Detailed Descriptions

Monday, May 11

The Bower

Tucked into the rolling foothills of the northern Appalachian Mountains just outside Shermans Dale, The Bower offers plant-loving travelers a rare blend of native landscape, thoughtful horticulture, and compelling land art. Spread across roughly 36 acres of meadow and woodland, this sanctuary is designed to celebrate the beauty of native plant communities while inviting visitors into a deeply sensory outdoor experience. Our hosts, Jane and Bill, will lead us on a guided tour and time will be available to explore on your own.

The expansive six-acre meadow is where carefully managed native grasses, wildflowers, and forbs thrive alongside naturalized drifts of perennial plantings. These open areas are rich with seasonal blooms that support pollinators and draw birds, butterflies, and other wildlife, making it a living classroom for plant ecology and ecosystem dynamics.

Winding paths lead from the meadow to quieter woodland edges and savanna transitions, where shady copses and forest trails invite deeper exploration. Interpretive signage and a visitor center provide context on native species and the design ethos that underpins the site. They developed a master site plan with Oehme, van Sweden Landscape Architects and a master horticulture plan with Larry Weaner Landscape Associates.

Interspersed throughout the landscapes are large-scale sculptures and land art pieces, thoughtfully sited to complement the natural forms and seasonal rhythms of the plants. These works add another layer of discovery and reflection as you wander.

Franklin & Angela Chow's Garden (no photography allowed)

Franklin and Angela Chow are woody peony hybridizing dynamos! Each year, during woody peony bloom, the pair work together to make thousands of crosses with a clear focus on certain plant attributes. All aspects of hybridizing are carried out with acute efficiency and with specific goals in mind. Concentration on plants with superior flower carriage and upright plant habit is their foremost goal, which they commonly achieve. They also focus on other desirable features such as dark red flowers with Rockii traits and woody peony cut flowers.

The Chows ascribe to the notion that a good hybridizing program has a good culling program, which they practice ruthlessly. Franklin and Angela are private individuals who have practiced and honed their craft since 2010. After 16 years, they have made about 25,000 crosses, collected 250,000 seeds, kept 25,000 seedlings to bloom, and transplanted 4,000 plants. They will be registering about 120 seedlings, which speaks to their patience in evaluating and releasing only what they believe to be quality improvements in woody peonies.

Few hybridizers work with woody peonies, and their work within this group is much needed and has been recognized by the American Peony Society with the A.P. Saunders Memorial Medal, awarded in 2023.

According to Franklin, "It was at least 5 times more hard work than my Ph.D. degree, but we enjoy it. We have designed a new way for future breeding starting this year, and will explain it to your group when you visit."

No photography is allowed at their garden because of the proprietary nature of their breeding work.

Big Spring Spirits

Big Spring Spirits is a craft distillery using the finest local ingredients to make award-winning spirits. They produce over a dozen products that the talented bar staff blend into artisanal cocktails. They built a state-of-the-art, Gold LEED-certified facility located in the Match Factory complex in beautiful Victorian Bellefonte, just north of Penn State and State College. Big Spring Spirits also serves note-worthy beer and ciders originating in Pennsylvania. We will have a tour, tasting, and dinner here.

Tuesday, May 12

Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center (Rock Springs)

The Agronomy and Horticulture Research Farms are located approximately 10 miles southwest of University Park at the Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center. Plant science, plant pathology, and entomology are the major departments involved at these facilities, which also is the site of the annual College of Agriculture's Ag Progress Days. Several other departments within the College of Agricultural Sciences as well as other colleges at Penn State cooperate in the work done at the Research Center. The land for this center was purchased starting in the late 1950's and has grown to over 2100 acres.

Approximately 16 faculty members are involved in research tests each year at the farms, with more than one-half of these faculty utilizing the farms for a major portion of their research. A farm committee serves in an advisory capacity. The role of the farm staff is to provide assistance to the project leaders. Land preparation (plowing, fertilization, herbicides, etc.) and maintenance (cultivation, spraying, etc.) are done by the farm staff. Direct research treatments are made by the researcher or by a farm crew member under the direct guidance of the faculty member. We expect to meet with some researchers and farm staff during our visit.

The Arboretum at Penn State

Nestled at the edge of campus in State College, The Arboretum at Penn State offers plant enthusiasts a rich blend of history, horticulture, and forward-looking vision. Penn State first set aside land for an arboretum in 1914, planting the seeds for what would become a vibrant living museum. Nearly a century later, Charles H. "Skip" Smith's pioneering \$10 million lead gift in 2007 enabled the University to bring the arboretum from long-held plan to reality. The initial phase of

the H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens opened to the public in 2009, marking a transformative moment for the campus and region.

Today, the H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens encompass 10 beautifully designed acres within the larger arboretum, with an additional 20 acres of cultivated gardens planned for the future. These display gardens showcase artful combinations of trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals, highlighting sustainable practices suited to central Pennsylvania. Since opening, thousands of donors have helped expand the gardens, sponsoring new areas including Childhood's Gate Children's Garden (2014) and the Pollinator and Bird Garden (2021), both inspiring examples of design that supports habitat, education, and seasonal beauty.

Beyond the formal gardens lie 360 acres of additional Arboretum lands—fields and woodlands being restored, used for research, and developed as educational and recreational project sites.

Wednesday, May 13

[Hybrid Chestnut Seed Orchard at The Arboretum at Penn State](#)

The Arboretum at Penn State is a partner with The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) in its program to breed a variety of American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) resistant to chestnut blight, a deadly fungal disease introduced from Asia at the turn of the 20th century. Lacking natural resistance to the blight, American chestnut populations were decimated across the species' entire 300,000-square-mile range. American chestnut was especially common in Pennsylvania, where it was one of the most abundant trees.

Breeding a blight-resistant variety requires the use of genes from one of the Asian chestnuts that have resistance. The TACF breeding orchard in the Arboretum contains 5th-generation trees and is still in development. Ultimately, the Arboretum orchard will yield seedlings with elevated levels of resistance created specifically for Pennsylvania, and these seedlings will be available for distribution. The Pennsylvania program is the most advanced blight-resistance breeding program in the country, other than the central TACF program in southwestern Virginia.

[Palmer Museum of Art](#)

The Palmer Museum of Art is one of central Pennsylvania's premier cultural destinations. Located on The Pennsylvania State University's University Park campus and adjacent to The Arboretum at Penn State, the museum houses a growing permanent collection of nearly 11,000 works of art spanning American and European painting, sculpture, prints, photography, ceramics, and objects from ancient and global cultures — making it the most significant academic art museum between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Visitors can enjoy thought-provoking exhibitions alongside works ranging from historic portraits and landscapes to contemporary installations. The Palmer is committed to engaging all ages through free admission, educational programs, guided tours, and opportunities for creative discovery.

[Spring Creek Canyon](#)

Just outside of Bellefonte, the 1800+ acre Spring Creek Canyon is a unique unspoiled area. Formerly, it was part of Rockview Penitentiary and was closed to the public. The land was made public land – and protected from development – in 2011. A 4.4 mile trail goes through the canyon along the world-famous trout fly fishing stream, Spring Creek. The trail gives great views of the limestone cliffs that make this a "canyon." This is also a great place to see native woodland plants that prefer limestone soil. We will access the trail from Fisherman's Paradise, a fly fishing only section of the creek where a trout fish hatchery used to operate.

[Penn State Berkey Creamery](#)

In 1865, dairy research began at Penn State, and the creamery was established along with a blacksmith's shop and hayloft. With their science-based processes, they create luscious ice creams and gooey cheeses that are the pride of their hometown. The mission of the Berkey Creamery is to support the teaching, research and outreach programs of the Department of Food Science, to provide quality dairy products to students in on-campus housing, and to maintain an economically viable retail outlet for dairy products to the University community. They've got it down to a science – literally. The methods developed by Penn State's food and dairy scientists have made the Creamery a world authority on ice cream and dairy manufacturing. Their legendary short course has attracted some of the biggest names in ice cream, from Baskin-Robbins to Haagen-Dazs. For six days a year, industry pros flock to Penn State from around the world to learn how to craft ice cream to perfection.

Our Accommodations

The Nittany Lion Inn

The historic Nittany Lion Inn has been a beloved landmark on Pennsylvania State University's University Park campus since it opened in 1931, combining classic charm with modern comfort. Built in a Georgian colonial style, the Inn has long been known as "Penn State's living room," welcoming generations of visitors — from university families and alumni to distinguished guests including Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Hayes, and Louis Armstrong.

Today, the Inn offers beautifully refreshed guestrooms and suites that blend traditional elegance with contemporary amenities. Guests enjoy spacious, smoke-free accommodations with thoughtful touches and convenient features, making it a comfortable base for our stay.

On-site dining options reflect both Penn State tradition and modern culinary flair, with places like Lionne restaurant and 1855 Lounge — perfect for a relaxed meal or social evening. Recent renovations have also updated public spaces, meeting rooms, and banquet facilities while preserving the Inn's historic character.

Located within walking distance of downtown State College and a short drive from scenic Centre County attractions, the Inn's central location makes it an ideal stop for travelers exploring the area's culture, campus life, and local sights.

Trip Pricing and Conditions

# of Nights:	Room Occupancy:	Per Person Cost:	Included in price:	Not included in price:
2	Single Occupancy	\$1154.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lodging at the Nittany Lion Inn Meals as noted; group dinners include alcoholic beverages as noted on itinerary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakfasts Hotel incidentals and room gratuity
2	Double Occupancy	\$988.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation on Starr Charter, including driver gratuity All tours and entrance fees \$30 per person non-refundable, tax-deductible donation to the Associates of Scott Arboretum & Gardens (\$10 per day, per person) 	

General Information

- All trip participants must be members of the Associates of Scott Arboretum & Gardens. [Visit our website to become a member.](#)
- The maximum number of participants is 30 and pricing is based on 26 participants. If less than 26 people register, the per person cost may need to change to cover overhead costs.
- Due to unforeseen circumstances, it may be necessary to alter the order of garden visits or, in the event of an owner's illness or other unforeseen catastrophe, to substitute another property of similar attraction.
- **To protect your investment, we highly recommend purchasing travel insurance.**
- Dietary restrictions: We will do our best to accommodate all dietary restrictions. A survey will be sent following registration for participants to select their meals.

Accessibility

- Expect several miles of walking each day, including on uneven ground and/ or unpaved surfaces.
- Some sites may not be ADA accessible.
- Some tours will require groups to stand without seating for a portion of the tour.

Financial Schedule

- To register for this trip, full payment of either single or double occupancy rate is required.
- The registration fee includes a \$30 non-refundable, tax-deductible donation to the Associates of Scott Arboretum & Gardens.

Refunds and Cancellations

- If a cancellation is made in writing before Monday, April 27, 2026 at 4:30 pm, 50% of your payment will be refunded, minus the \$30 non-refundable donation to the Associates of Scott Arboretum & Gardens.
- After Monday, April 27, 2026, your payment cannot be refunded.
- To protect your investment, we highly recommend purchasing travel insurance.

Liability

- Each participant must complete the attached liability waiver for Swarthmore College.
- Registration will not be considered complete until both the liability waiver and payment have been received.

FULL RELEASE & PROMISE NOT TO SUE [COLLEGE] AND ITS REPRESENTATIVES

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY! This form must be completed BEFORE participation in the Activity will be allowed. All persons completing this document MUST be at least 18 years of age.

Name and Description of "Activity": This is a 3-day bus trip to Centre County, PA with Scott Arboretum & Gardens. We will visit public and private gardens, the PSU Horticulture Research Farm, and places of natural beauty. Accommodations will be at The Nittany Lion Inn.

Start/End Date(s): May 11, 2026, to May 13, 2026, Location(s): Penn State University, Centre County
Sponsoring Organization(s): Scott Arboretum
S.O. Contact Name Mackenzie Knight-Fochs : #: 610-328-8024

Releasing Participant: _____

Notices:

- Participation in this Activity is completely voluntary.
In the event of a medical emergency, emergency response personnel will be contacted.
Because of insurance limitations, [College] independent contractors, employees (staff, supervisors, student workers) and volunteers shall not, under any circumstances, store, dispense or administer any form of medication to participants of the Activity. This requirement cannot be waived under any circumstances.
[College] does not carry medical insurance for injuries sustained by participants of the Activity. The absence of health insurance coverage does not make [College] responsible for payment of any medical expenses for a participant.

RELEASE: In return for [College] allowing me to voluntarily participate in the Activity, I agree and promise, for myself and my representatives, not to sue [College] and its representatives, including its agents, board of managers and officers, insurers, attorneys, employees, students and volunteers, for any and all liability, claims, demands, and/or causes of action whatsoever, whether known now or in the future, arising out of my own participation in this Activity and related activities – whether such claims, demands, and/or causes of action result from the negligent act(s) or omission(s) of [College].

I further agree and acknowledge that I understand, assume and accept all possible risks arising out of, associated with, or relating to my participating in the Activity and related activities, even though such risks may have been caused by the negligence of [College] or its representatives. These risks may include, but are not limited to, property damage, economic loss, mental and emotional anguish, bodily illness/injury (including broken bones, tissue damage, exposure/infection to SARS-CoV-2 and variants, and death), and may result from, but is not limited to, physical contact, conflict with others, outdoor exposure/effects of weather conditions, traveling to/from/around the Activity location, food consumption, as well as any other circumstance listed here: _____

I also agree to be solely responsible for any injury, loss, or damage, which I might sustain or cause while participating in the Activity, even though such injury, loss, or damage may have been caused by the negligence of [College] or its representatives.

General Terms: The signor may execute this RELEASE & PROMISE NOT TO SUE using an electronic signature, and the signor waives any legal requirement that this document be embodied, stored or reproduced in tangible media, and agrees that an electronic reproduction shall have the same legal force and effect as a signed original.

This document shall be enforceable to the fullest extent of the law, and if any provision is declared by a court of competent jurisdiction to be illegal, void, or unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall continue to be valid and enforceable.

Acknowledgement: I acknowledge:

- that I have read and understand this RELEASE & PROMISE NOT TO SUE, and that it is legally binding upon myself and my heirs, executors, administrators, and representatives in the event of my death or incapacity,
that I am legally authorized and competent to sign this document, I am at least 18 years old, and I have voluntarily executed this RELEASE & PROMISE NOT TO SUE

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Print Your Full Name _____ Phone# _____

Address _____