

# Mary May Binney Wakefield Arboretum: A new ACS Reference Garden in the Northeast Region

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*Picea abies* 'Perry's Gold' (Perry's Gold Norway spruce).

The Mary May Binney Wakefield Arboretum, in Milton, MA, was originally home to 10 consecutive generations of the same family, beginning with John Davenport in 1706 and continuing through Mary "Polly" Wakefield, who died in 2004. Before her death, Polly created the Mary May Binney Wakefield Charitable Trust to preserve and restore the buildings and gardens that she and her predecessors had built.

Polly Wakefield trained as a landscape architect and plant propagator. She began her love affair with plant collecting in 1956, when she started taking classes with Roger Coggershall at Harvard's Arnold Arboretum. Each year, participants in Roger's propagation class received permission to collect seed from one tree in the Arboretum's collection. Polly fell in love with *Cornus kousa* (Korean dogwood) and took seed from the same two trees for more than 40 years. Polly grew fond of *kousas* because, to her, each tree had unique bark, bracts, fruit, and leaves. She ended up selecting and patenting eight cultivars of *Cornus kousa* after planting more than 600 *kousa* seedlings on her property.

Her interests in plant propagation and in developing a collection grew far beyond *Cornus* to include a wide

variety of conifers. Because she enjoyed trees with unusual bark, she collected *Pinus bungeana* (lacebark pine), *Sciadopitys verticillata* (Japanese umbrella pine), *Cryptomeria japonica* (Japanese cedar), and *Chamaecyparis pisifera* (sawara false-cypress), all originating from seeds, cuttings, or grafts from the Arnold's collections. She created a four-square planting of *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* (dawn redwood) around 1958 that is even now the anchor of the formal gardens.

Polly developed a fondness for dwarf conifers while working with Al Fordham, and Donald Wyman, the Arnold propagator and arboretum horticulturalist, respectively. Al Fordham wrote extensively for *Arnoldia*, the quarterly magazine of the Arnold Arboretum, about conifers and dwarf conifers. He was a leading expert on the propagation of gymnosperms and published the *Propagation Manual of Selected Gymnosperms*. His expertise in woody plant propagation was widely acknowledged, and colleagues, both here and abroad, sought his advice. After learning from these two men, Polly created a small garden of dwarf conifers and Japanese maples in 1990 and named it "The Witches' Garden". Today, the 30-year-old dwarf conifers have outgrown their space, and Japanese maples are shading them out. Careful restoration of healthy conifers and the removal of dying ones are allowing the garden to survive for a few more years before a more drastic renovation will have to take place.

The Arboretum's staff thoughtfully designed and installed a wide array of colorful gates and finials in the landscape. Handmade, colorful lanterns, and carefully placed mirrors add elements of whimsy that visitors of all ages appreciate. Polly loved animals of all kinds, and artists sculpted these animals as statuary in many parts of the garden. There is even a colorful wooden bird swing at the end of a long avenue of dogwoods!

Polly Wakefield passed away in 2004 and left her property in a private trust to be used for education and community engagement. Ten years of neglect prior to her death and heavy deer browsing led to the severe decline of old, massive *Taxus* (yew) hedges and much of the woody understory. In 2012, the trustees created





*Abies koreana* 'Horstmann's Silberlocke' (Horstmann's Silberlocke Korean fir).





A wider view of part of the Reference Garden.

a landscape management plan, beginning with the installation of deer fencing. Five acres of the formal gardens now have fencing, in order to protect newly planted specimens and old, severely damaged yet salvageable, yew hedges. Since that time, staff have rejuvenated many of the plants in the landscape, and have added new ones, focusing on Japanese maples, *Magnolia*, and several dwarf conifer cultivars.

In order to highlight Polly's interest in dwarf conifers, the Arboretum staff has created a brand-new garden. This garden tackles a difficult site on the property, highlights Polly's love for unusual conifers, and continues her legacy of developing unique garden spaces in her landscape. The dwarf conifer garden is a wonderful addition to a beautiful landscape.

New plants have come from Broken Arrow Nursery (Hamden, CT) and from ACS plant sales, using grant money provided by the Northeast Region. More recently, a staff trip to Iseli nursery in Oregon resulted in the procurement of many new plants to be added in the future.

The American Conifer Society certified the Arboretum as a Conifer Reference Garden in 2018. Since that time, the Arboretum has held a wide variety of classes and events that focus on the collection, led by conifer enthusiasts Christie and Elmer Dustman. The Arboretum is home to 400 species of woody plants, 120 of which are conifers. Wakefield is a place well worth visiting!

The beginning of the Reference Garden.







Polly's dogwood lane.

**There are a total of 76 conifer cultivars in the Wakefield Arboretum. These are some of the conifers.**

*Abies concolor* 'Wintergold' (Wintergold white fir)  
*Abies koreana* 'Horstmann's Silberlocke' (Horstmann's Silberlocke Korean fir)  
*Abies procera* 'Glauca' (blue Noble fir)  
*Calocedrus decurrens* 'Berrima Gold' (Berrima Gold incense-cedar)  
*Cedrus atlantica* 'Sapphire Nymph' (Sapphire Nymph Atlas cedar)  
*Cephalotaxus harringtonii* 'Fastigiata' (fastigate Japanese plum-yew)  
*Cupressus nootkatensis* 'Sparkling Arrow' (Sparkling Arrow Nootka cypress)  
*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Chirimen' (Chirimen Hinoki false-cypress)  
*Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Curly Tops' (Curly Tops sawara false-cypress)  
*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Mushroom' (Mushroom Japanese cedar)  
*Ginkgo biloba* 'Jehosephat' (Jehosephat maidenhair tree)  
*Juniperus communis* 'Gold Cone' (Gold Cone common juniper)

*Juniperus horizontalis* 'Mother Lode' (Mother Lode creeping juniper)  
*Juniperus × pfitzeriana* 'Daub's Frosted' (Daub's Frosted Pfitzer juniper)  
*Metasequoia glyptostroboides* 'Schirrmann's Nordlicht' (Schirrmann's Nordlicht dawn redwood)  
*Picea abies* 'Acro-yellow' (Acro-yellow Norway spruce)  
*Picea glauca* var. *albertiana* 'Daisy's White' (Daisy's White dwarf Alberta spruce)  
*Picea omorika* 'Kamenz' (Kamenz Serbian spruce)  
*Picea orientalis* 'Firefly' (Firefly Caucasian spruce)  
*Picea orientalis* 'Skylands' (Skylands Caucasian spruce)  
*Picea pungens* 'The Blues' (The Blues Colorado spruce)  
*Pinus strobus* 'Mini Twists' (Mini Twists eastern white pine)  
*Pinus densiflora* 'Burkes Red Variegated' (Burke's Red Variegated Japanese red pine)  
*Pinus mugo* 'Aurea' (golden mugo pine)  
*Taxus baccata* 'David' (David English yew)  
*Taxodium distichum* 'Gee Wizz' (Gee Wizz bald cypress)  
*Tsuga canadensis* 'Moon Frost' (Moon Frost Canadian hemlock)





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