

Historic Blooms at Presby

1. **Now in its 89th year, the Essex County Presby Memorial Iris Gardens is presenting the public with an unforgettable display of bearded iris, known as the ‘Rainbow on the Hill’**
2. **The Essex County Presby Memorial Iris Gardens, <http://presbyirisgardens.org>, is internationally renowned as the largest public iris garden in the United States, with display beds containing nearly 1,500 iris varieties (around 14,000 plants) that produce over 100,000 blooms**
3. **The anticipated bloom season is from Thursday, May 12 through Friday, June 3, starting with their “minis” bearded collection, then to the famed tall bearded irises and ends with non-bearded irises.**
4. **A searchable database for local nurseries and garden centers that offer ‘Jersey Grown’ products is available at www.jerseygrown.nj.gov.**

Historic Blooms at Presby

By Nicholas Polanin

If you happened to miss the cherry blossom festival at Branch Brook Park in Newark and Belleville this early spring, why not set some time aside early in May and get out to see the blooms at the Essex County Presby Memorial Iris Gardens? The Gardens are celebrating their 89th year of presenting the public with an unforgettable display of bearded iris, known as the ‘Rainbow on the Hill.’ Families, couples, artists, photographers, and iris lovers marvel at the sight of thousands of iris in bloom each May – and you should too.

The Essex County Presby Memorial Iris Gardens, <http://presbyirisgardens.org>, is internationally renowned as the largest public iris garden in the United States, with display beds containing nearly 1,500 iris varieties (around 14,000 plants) that produce over 100,000 blooms. It is also a living museum of botanical preservation with some varieties dating back to the 1500’s and is listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Sites.

“The Presby Memorial Iris Gardens welcomes spring with its landmark display of blooms,” said Nancy Skjei-Lawes, Board President of the Citizens Committee of the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens. “And this year, we are especially looking forward to the arrival of the American Iris Society, www.irises.org/. We can’t wait for the American Iris Society to see the history of bearded iris unfold in our rainbow display as well as the 887 guest convention iris. We hope visitors and convention goers will enjoy the blooms and delight in our honey bee yard.”

“The Presby Memorial Iris Gardens is recognized internationally for their horticultural and historical significance,” Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. said. “Our unique public-private partnership preserves and protects this New Jersey treasure. We look forward to sharing this wonder with iris enthusiasts from across the country and around the world. We invite the public to come out and enjoy the dazzling display of colors on the ‘Rainbow on the Hill,’ and support the Citizens Committee’s work to maintain this valuable resource.”

The anticipated bloom season is from Thursday, May 12 through Friday, June 3, though as any gardener knows, Mother Nature follows her own calendar and bloom length and timing can vary year to year. Bloom season begins its annual display starting with their “minis” bearded collection, then to the famed tall bearded irises and ends with non-bearded irises. Live Jazz music is offered at the gardens weekends during Bloom Season, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

In addition to the spectacular iris display, visitors will be invited to peruse the Bloom Room gift shop which will be open with an exciting mix of affordable house, garden and iris-related items Friday, May 6 through Sunday, May 8 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Presby's Iris Plant Sale, also the same dates, will offer iris dug from their gardens. Their popular Mother's Day luncheon, Sunday, May 8 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., invites visitors to treat mom to a special luncheon and iris or item from their Bloom Room Gift Shop.

The following weekend, Sunday, May 15 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. features the TaikoZoku Japanese Drumming Show, while Saturday, May 21 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. (with a rain date of Sunday, May 22) is the Family Garden Party, a free community event sponsored by Essex County Parks with entertainment, crafts, face painting, booths from local organizations such as the Essex County Environmental Center and Rutgers Master Gardeners, and various food trucks. A student art exhibit will also be featured.

The Essex County Presby Memorial Iris Gardens is located at 474 Upper Mountain Avenue (at the base of Mountainside Park) in Upper Montclair, New Jersey. During bloom season, admission is a suggested \$8 donation to help fund garden costs. The Gardens are open daily from dawn until dusk.

For more information about the 2016 bloom season, please contact them by phone (973) 783-5974; by email info@presbyirisgardens.org; at their website www.presbyirisgardens.org; on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Presby-Memorial-Iris-Gardens/132321776804564>; and on Twitter @PresbyIris.

Get thee a shrubbery

New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher recently joined the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association to remind residents that it's time to start planning this season's gardens and landscaping.

"Now is a great time to think about this year's garden and to visit a nursery or garden center to discuss spring plantings that will brighten your landscape all season long," said Secretary Fisher. "Remember to ask for Jersey Grown to ensure your plants are accustomed to New Jersey's growing season and are pest- and disease-free."

Jersey Grown growers are listed on the Jersey Grown website at www.jerseygrown.nj.gov. There is also a search option to find nurseries and garden centers near you. The website is now optimized for easy access on tablets and mobile phones as well.

"New Jersey is home to a robust wholesale and retail horticultural industry," said Dominick Mondy, Executive Director of the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association. "Independent garden centers exemplify the quality of products and service we expect out of the small businesses that comprise our membership. Home owners around the state should avail themselves of the knowledgeable individuals at local nurseries and garden centers to improve their properties, and their lives, through plants."

Local nurseries and garden centers are known for their expertise and service and sell a wide range of products for the landscape and home garden, including trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, seasonal flowers and tropical plants, components for organic gardening, mulches, stone, fertilizer, garden architecture, water gardening supplies and fish, interlocking pavers, seeds, sod, firewood, and Christmas trees.

Nurseries and garden centers are part of the \$358 million dollar New Jersey horticultural industry. To promote the industry, the Jersey Grown branding program was created and over the years expanded so it now includes trees, shrubs, flowers, annuals, perennials, Christmas trees, firewood, wood and black oil sunflower seed for birdseed.

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