

# Gardening *at* Andalusia

*The home of the Biddle family since Nicholas Biddle acquired it in 1814, Andalusia has over two-centuries of expanding gardens and its idyllic grounds have recently received official status as an arboretum*

*By Lori Rose*



Photos: James Biddle

Opposite, daffodils on the Woodland Walk. Above, pink dogwoods frame the quilted tapestry of perennial plants designed by Lady Arabella Lenox-Boyd at the beginning of the Green Walk.

Andalusia is one of the gems of Bucks County, with its stunning grounds and historic architecture. As you drive through the industrial parks of Bensalem, turning into the driveway to Andalusia is, as Head Gardener Bill Fuchs says, “like entering a time warp. It is a unique and special place on the Delaware River.” Although we are unable to tour the Big House at this time, we can still tour the gardens. And what spectacular gardens they are!

Originally built by Philadelphia merchant John Craig in 1795 to escape the city and the outbreak of yellow fever, the house and grounds were acquired by Nicholas Biddle, President of the Second US Bank and head of the Society for Promotion of Agriculture, from his wife Jane Craig’s family estate in 1814. Andalusia has been the seat of the Biddle family, of Baily Banks & Biddle fame, ever since.

Take a stroll on the River Walk to see the architectural fea-

tures of the property. The Big House was designed by Benjamin Latrobe, who designed some of early America’s most important buildings including the President’s House and the Capitol in Washington, D.C. It is one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the United States. The extensive library at Andalusia contains more than 3,000 rare volumes, some dating back to the 17th century, all preserved in their original environment. On the shelves is Nicholas Biddle’s signed copy of the 1814 *Lewis and Clark Journal*, which he edited, as well as a book called

*Every Man His Own Gardener*, where the original owner of Andalusia listed all the flowers he planted in the 1790s.

At the river’s edge is the Grotto, a charming gothic folly where the Biddles’ ashes are interred. The Billiard House from the 1830s is private, but one can still see it gracing the grounds. The Cottage was built in 1837 in the Gothic Style by Jane Biddle for overflow guests. The Biddle family still owns that part of the property where they gather for holidays.

Take the Green Walk to the Walled Garden, which according



to Fuchs is “the star of the show”, not only for the gardens contained therein but also for its historical essence. Here, Nicholas Biddle originally grew fine table grapes for consumption and for market. Although the greenhouse is not there anymore, an archeological dig in the 1990s showed how it would have looked, and there is now a mock greenhouse in its place, along with the original stoke houses for coal heating into the greenhouse.

Continue along the Green Walk past the Father’s Garden and the Conifer Border to the Gold Garden, and you will spot two greyhound statues marking the walkway to the Pet Cemetery, a peaceful spot where the Biddle’s beloved pets are buried and remembered.

After Nicholas Biddle died, the gardens were maintained but not expanded. When Letitia Glenn Biddle married into the family in 1888, the Walled Garden was mostly used for vegetables. She brought her knowledge of gardening and flowers and beauty to Andalusia and helped grow and enlarge the gardens. She was a founding member of the Philadelphia Garden Club, and they had their first meeting at Andalusia. The bylaws and constitution of the Garden Club of America were created in the Billiard House. As a member of these prominent organizations, Letitia was also among the founders of the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women, one of America’s first horticulture schools established by women for women, now Temple University’s Ambler Campus. Letitia Glenn Biddle gave a great boost to Andalusia’s

*Below, inside the Walled Garden a hedge of Ilex separates perennials and old garden roses from the mock greenhouse where grapes are grown. Opposite, a pot of vinca surrounded by geraniums and punctuated by yucca marks the entrance to the Walled Garden.*







gardens, and gardening itself in the Philadelphia area.

The Andalusia Foundation's website, [www.andalusiapa.org](http://www.andalusiapa.org), tells us that "in 1980, James Biddle, then President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a leader of the historic preservation movement in the United States, made the decision to divide Andalusia and give away the Big House and nearly 15 acres of land to the Andalusia Foundation. The time had come, he felt, to share Andalusia's beauty with others who would understand and appreciate it just as the Biddle family had done for generations. Since that time, the Andalusia Foundation has cared for this incredible building and welcomed tens of thousands of visitors to share in its history, and step back in time to imagine lives played out long before our own." Friends of Andalusia are individuals, corporations, and organizations dedicated to the fi-

ancial support of the Andalusia Foundation. Membership provides access to information, tours, and special events throughout the year, as well as the critical financial support required to maintain and open the estate for public tours.

The current members of the Biddle family are very involved with the Foundation and the property. A few years ago, they brought in Lady Arabella Lenox-Boyd from England to redesign and re-imagine some of the gardens. She has done very few gardens in the US, which is yet another reason to visit Andalusia. Lady Arabella Lenox-Boyd has a book coming out soon—wouldn't it be lovely if Andalusia is in it!

Last year, on Arbor Day, Andalusia was awarded Level II accreditation by ArbNet, a program sponsored and coordinated by the Morton Arboretum in cooperation with the American

Public Gardens Association and Botanic Gardens Conservation International. It is now recognized in the Morton Register of Arboreta, a database of the world's tree-focused public gardens. This National Historic Landmark is now named Andalusia Historic House, Gardens and Arboretum. The Arboretum is home to over 800 trees, including 250 unique specimens, such as tulip poplar, native tupelo, beech, and many varieties of maple and conifer trees.

"The 100-acre property is the ancestral home of the Biddle family and is a natural paradise of native woodlands and spectacular formal gardens," the announcement about the arboretum designation noted.

Gardening on the estate began right away, and has been ever-changing over the years, and will continue to evolve, according to

*Opposite top, trellises of climbing roses frame a view of the water pump room. Opposite bottom, phlox and hydrangea at the foot of a statue lovingly called Lady Laguna. Above, the side entrance to the Walled Garden is covered in wisteria, with nepeta (catmint) lining the path.*





Above, autumn at the main entrance to Andalusia. Bottom, the Grotto and a sugar maple on the River Walk. Top inset a spectacular view of the house from the River Walk.



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## Doylestown Town & Country

*Doylestown Town & Country*, a guide to living in Doylestown and the surrounding area is published by Bucks County Magazine. This full-color guide features businesses, entertainment, dining, interesting people, places and things that make Doylestown a special place to live, work and play.

*Spring issue Deadline March 31st*  
*Contact Vicky Waite 215-480-9675*



Executive Director Connie Houchins. “There is something about water that is soothing to the soul,” says Houchins, and there is seating along the river to sit and contemplate, as well as many surprises along the garden walks. Her office is in the Big House, and she loves to walk the grounds to see what is blooming. From daffodils on the Woodland Walk to spring bulbs in the Easter Garden to wisteria in the Walled Garden to roses on trellises and in the Rose Garden, the flowering plants of Andalusia are a tapestry of color and form. Lady Arabella’s redesign included over ten thousand trees, shrubs, roses and perennials, separating the public gardens from the private areas of Andalusia, with subtly changing color schemes and patterns emerging as you walk along.

**B**ill Fuchs is Andalusia’s Head Gardener, and he lives on the grounds. He grew up farming and got his Bachelors’ Degree in Horticulture from Temple University in Ambler, the same school of horticulture Letitia Glenn Biddle helped found. Bill started at Andalusia as an intern and became head gardener within a few years. After leaving to start his own business, he returned to Andalusia in 2013 just in time for Lady Arabella Lenox-Boyd’s redesign of the gardens. He loves the entire property, and says he feels best standing on the front lawn surrounded by huge trees, the river, and the Big House with its soaring columns, engulfed in the history and natural beauty that is Andalusia. Bill oversees each and every tree, shrub and plant on the grounds with love and care. When some of the rose bushes became infested, Bill employed Integrated

Pest Management (IPM), which according to the Environmental Protection Agency is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment.

This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pest damage with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment. Bill loves Andalusia and the rich history of the house, but mostly because “it is a really peaceful place to enjoy the river and gardens”.

Ready to visit Andalusia? Public self-guided tours are available twice a day at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from April 5 through October 27, 2021 excluding holidays. Each Public Tour will have a maximum number of 25 tickets available for purchase. Reservations must be made online in advance at [www.andalusiapa.org](http://www.andalusiapa.org). Private self-guided garden tours are available by reservation Thursdays and Fridays at 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. for \$15 per person. A minimum group of six is required for private tours and must be reserved three days in advance by calling 215-245-5479.

Open Saturdays provide special opportunities for you to visit Andalusia Historic House, Gardens and Arboretum on weekend days when these historic grounds are typically closed to the public. Stroll the grounds at your own pace and take in the beauty of Andalusia’s gardens. Visitors can bring a picnic lunch to enjoy along the river’s edge—please carry out anything



*Opposite bottom, recycled rebar horses from an art gallery in New York grace the Horse Meadow. Above, two greyhound statues mark the walkway to the Pet Cemetery.*

that you carry in. Dates for 2021 Open Saturdays are: April 3, May 8, June 5, September 18, October 23 and November 6. Tours are available from 10 a.m.–12pm and 1 p.m.–3 p.m. Tickets are \$15 per person and reservations must be made online in advance at [www.andalusiapa.org](http://www.andalusiapa.org).

During the months of November-March, tours for 6 to 25 people may be made by calling 214-245-5479 a few days in advance. A minimum fee of \$90 for 6 visitors is required to tour Andalusia in the winter months. Please note there are no public restrooms available during the winter months.

There is no charge for children under 12. Sturdy footwear is recommended as some paths are unmaded. Tours do continue in wet weather, so sturdy shoes or boots along with suitable weatherproof clothing are recommended. Please wear a mask if it becomes difficult to keep social distance from people outside your group.

This magical place is also available for weddings. Call 215-245-5479 for more information.

What does the future hold for Andalusia’s gardens? As the website so eloquently states, “Lady Lennox-Boyd’s elegant vision for the reimagined gardens overlooking the river at Andalusia is now complete. Even so, these gardens will never truly be finished. For all their beauty and refinement, they are, by definition, a work in progress. Today, they are at the height of their glory; they will take different forms in the generations ahead. What those will be, we cannot guess. All that is certain is that their collective history will continue to be written—by one visionary gardener after another, working with lovely flora from all over the world.”

*Lori Rose, the Midnight Gardener, is a Temple University Certified Master Home Gardener and member of GardenComm: Garden Communicators International. She has gardened since childhood and has been writing about gardening for over twenty years.*