

Heritage Museums & Gardens is set on 100 acres in historic Sandwich, Massachusetts. Within the gardens is an impressive collection of rhododendrons, which were hybridized by the internationally-known Charles Owen Dexter.

DEXTER RHODODENDRONS—THE FACTS

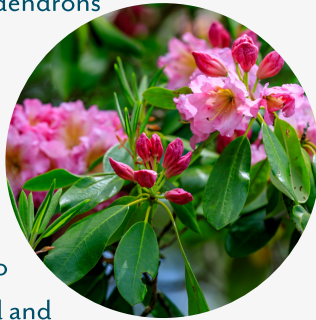
Typical bloom season: early May to mid-June

Heritage has approximately 160 named varieties of Dexter and Cowles rhododendrons and tens of thousands of unnamed varieties

Dexter rhododendrons can be found in colors ranging from pure white, to pale yellow and pink to red and purple with combinations of each.

Many of the plants are of a fragrance reminiscent of orange blossom or even a slightly fruity fragrance.

Heritage's most notable rhododendrons include: 'Scintillation' - with a subtle pink color with shades of yellow, 'Scintillation' is considered to be the best of the plants created by Dexter. It can grow up to 8' tall and 8' wide in 20 years, has a pleasant fragrance, and when closely examined, its flower clusters are 8-10" across and made up of 20+ funnel-shaped clear pink blossoms with freckling on the upper side.



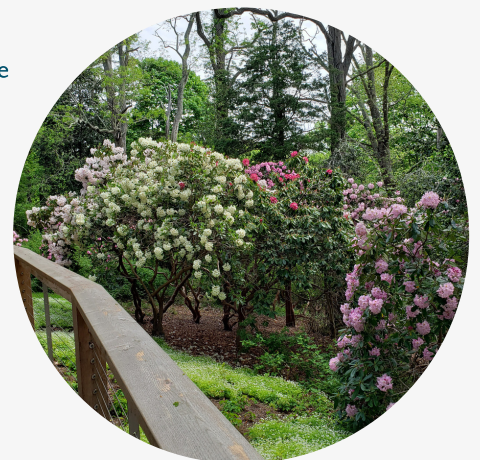
'Yellow Gate' hybridized by Estate Superintendent J.C. Cowles in the 1960s, the 'Yellow Gate' rhododendron begins its bloom with coral pink buds that open into vibrant yellow petals.



'Dexter's Orange' - an original Dexter hybrid that boasts wonderful pink flowers that appear orange from a distance. They have the added bonus of being wonderfully fragrant.

'Dexter's Spice' - boasts one of the largest white flower clusters of any rhododendron. This cultivar is known for its fragrant flowers that have a distinctive spicy fragrance.

'Eben Jordan' - hybridized by Dexter Estate Superintendent J.C. Cowles in the 1960s, 'Eben Jordan' is known for its beautiful magenta color with a white blush and deep magenta spots.



With his uncle and cousin, established the Beacon Manufacturing Company, which became one of the largest manufacturers of cotton blankets in the United States.

Bought the Heritage property, then known as Shawme Farm, in 1921 and began spending summers with his wife at Shawme Farm. Worked with Paul Frost, a well-known landscape architect from Cambridge, to turn the wooded Shawme Farm into a country estate and to assist in his hybridizing working. Started hybridizing rhododendrons in 1921 and worked for the next 22 years (1921-1943) on these plants in his garden. He started with vegetables and expanding his interest to rhododendrons.



To develop his rhododendrons, Dexter collected plants from around the world, attempting to take the best characteristics from each plant and combine them into new cultivars. Records indicated he used in his crosses:

- *Rhododendron decorum*
- *R. fortunei* (dominant species in his work)
- *R. griersonianum*
- *R. haematodes*

Dexter's breeding goals were hardiness, clear bright colors, fragrance and big blossoms. His plants are typically hardy to -10 but flower buds are hardy to about 5 degrees above. At the height of his hybridizing, Dexter created over 10,000 rhododendron seedlings a year.

In the years 1945-1953, a rhododendron study group led by John Wister, then Director of the Scott Horticultural Foundation of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, began the search for plants that had left the former Dexter Estate. Over those years this group studied and collected plants from Longwood Gardens, the U.S. National Arboretum, Winterthur, John J. Tyler Arboretum, Morris Arboretum and Planting Fields Arboretum, as well as several other estates and gardens. The plants were propagated and eventually (1970-1972) brought to Heritage Museums & Gardens where they were evaluated and a selection of Dexter's cultivars were named.

