

SMALL GARDEN, BIG IMPACT  
**THE "LOGARIUM":  
 A DIFFERENT  
 KIND OF  
 SHADE GARDEN**

*Landon Gibbs*

Stumpery gardens are a horticultural oddity, highlighting fallen trees and root flares in unique and exciting displays that exhibit the natural architecture of woodlands and forests. These structures date back to mid-nineteenth-century England, but a new kind of stumpery has taken up residence at Cantigny Park, the 500-acre estate of former Chicago Tribune publisher and editor Colonel Robert R. McCormick.

Cantigny's shade garden drew inspiration from Victorian stumperies, but the goal was to create a plant-focused, multi-level, dynamic garden with a wild yet intentional look. The tree trunks, stumps, limbs, and root flares used in the building of the "Logarium" were sourced entirely from the property's natural areas, gardens, and grounds. The pieces used were selected based on their size, visual impact (bark, texture, hollows), and architectural interest. Trees that were completely uprooted were placed at elevated levels so the roots were visible from all sides and could be used as habitat for certain plant species. Beginning in late winter, a team of



Above: A large root flare and limb mangle to frame a planting of mosses, ferns, and coral bells (*Heuchera 'Sienna' Northern Exposure™*)

Left: Large pieces of petrified wood sit at the entrance to the Logarium







Top: An orchid (*Aliceara Stellar* 'Hoku') basks in early morning sun before being misted.

Middle: An Australian tree fern (*Alsophila australis*) sits as a focal point in the middle of the Logarium.

Bottom: A lady slipper (*Cypripedium* 'Kristi Lyn') hovers above a moss-covered log following the previous night's storm.

All Photos: Landon Gibbs

staff members worked to bring between twenty and twenty-five large pieces to the site where the garden would be built. Using a mini-skid steer and full-sized skid-loader, the multi-ton structure was carefully designed and constructed with the intent to provide a unique array of spaces to grow and display shade plants as well as allow for visitor interaction and viewing from all sides.

Following the placement of the base structure of the garden, the staff brought in a soil mix containing in-house compost, topsoil, and sand for drainage. The soil was brought up two to three feet in several areas to secure the logs and create different planting areas while blending large structural trunks into the ground. Eliminating harsh lines between the previous soil level and large trunks suggests a more natural union between plants and the structure of the Logarium, creating the appearance that the trees fell in place and the plants took over many years ago.

In April 2020, the horticulturists began planting a highly curated selection of unique perennials, shrubs, and mosses. Species were chosen based on their cultural needs, function, and prevalence in typical shade gardens. *Trillium flexipes* (nodding wakerobin), *Osmunda regalis* (royal fern), and *Arisaema triphyllum* (Jack-in-the-pulpit) keep the display representative of Illinois native species while plants like *Syneilesis aconitifolia* (shredded umbrella plant), *Anemonopsis macrophylla* (false anemone), and *Salvia koyamae* (yellow sage) represent lesser known, strikingly beautiful examples of shade perennials hardy to the Chicago region. *Primula* (primrose) species were located on the eastern side to take advantage of morning sun. Varieties of hardy *Cypripedium* (lady slipper orchids) were planted in protected locations near large stumps and trunks, and plants like *Rodgersia podophylla* 'Braunlaub' (rodersgia) and *Astilboides tabularis* (astilboides) were planted in spots where the bold foliage would stand out from every angle. Spring ephemerals and bulbs such as *Mertensia virginica* (Virginia bluebells), *Dodecatheon* 'Aphrodite' (shooting star), and *Erythronium* 'Pagoda' (trout lily) provide a succession of spring color, and fifteen species of fern planted in stumps, on logs, and in the ground create lush, vibrant texture throughout the season. Marginally hardy plants like *Carex scaposa* (Chinese pink fairy sedge), *Begonia grandis* (hardy begonia), and *Leucothoe fontanesiana* 'Girard's Rainbow' (drooping leucothoe) were placed in the most protected areas of the garden, tucked between overhanging branches and large tree trunks.

In late May, tropical plants were added to the garden to add flair and fill space as perennials mature. Epiphytic orchids and bromeliads were added to many of the root flares and branches using sphagnum moss and floral wire. A large specimen *Alsophila australis* (Australian tree fern) was centered in the garden and surrounded by *Xanthosoma* 'Lime Zinger' (elephant's ear) while *Anthurium andraeanum* (flamingo flower), *Asplenium nidus* (bird's nest fern), and *Philodendron* 'Rojo Congo' (philodendron) lined the walking path that allowed visitors a closer look. Three large pieces of petrified wood from the original gardens were incorporated into the edge of the garden to mark its entry.

The Logarium provides specialized micro-climates and areas that allow the cultivation of species that would perform poorly elsewhere in the park and gives them a place where they can be appreciated. The confluence of perennial and tropical material creates a synergistic garden that guests have come to enjoy when they visit Cantigny. While the term "Logarium" may not be well known, it is certainly one that, while still evolving, is all its own. 🌿

---

Landon Gibbs is a horticulturist at Cantigny Park in Wheaton, Illinois. Landon received his B.S. in horticulture from Murray State University and his M.S. in plant and soil science from University of Kentucky. Aside from working with perennials and native species, Landon enjoys working on bonsai.