



35 Years of Arboretum La Tuillière: more than just a collection of trees

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During a camping vacation in September 1990, while driving through the Corrèze (southwest France), we came across a small plot of land with 3.5 hectares of pasture, a large pond measuring 50x30 m, an old farmhouse (dating from around 1800), a barn (1861), an old wooden shed, and a few hundred-year-old trees. A dream.

We bought the property. In December 1990, we planted the very first trees: a row of Italian poplars. Twenty years later (fall 2011), we purchased an extra 5.5 hectares of adjacent grassland with a spring and a small patch of forest. Since then, the arboretum includes a total of 9 hectares. After 35 years, much of the pasture has turned into a “forest.”



Fig 1. Overview of part of the property in 1990. On the right, the large pond; on the left, a solitary apple tree. In the middle, the house, barn and wooden shed.



Fig 2. An aerial photo of part of the arboretum 2025

We renovated the buildings and made them livable, spending many short and long vacations there. That meant doing a lot of the work ourselves, but hiring local contractors to do even more.

The beginnings of the arboretum

We started planting trees straight away. We didn't really have a plan. In the early years, we were forced to plant mainly around the houses, as a farmer was mowing the grass. We deliberately planted the trees close together to quickly create a bit of a 'woodland feel'. And above all, lots of different conifers – that's still a passion of ours. That's how a mini-pinetum came into being. To educate ourselves, we took several dendrology courses organized by the Dutch Dendrological Society. The many dendrological excursions also taught us a great deal. Moreover, this helped us build a network of experts.

In the early years, we mainly bought from Dutch nurseries: we hauled trailer loads back to France! In recent years, we've been buying from French nurseries, either direct or through the internet.

We did, however, have a plan for the plot purchased in 2011. Trees were collected and planted according to their 'practical value'. This resulted in the following categories: ornamental trees, food and medicinal, transport, construction, musical instruments and sport. We also planted a Dutch *Spiraea* collection (over 100 taxa), a gift from a close friend. In the remaining

few hectares of pasture, 'retired' horses now graze in the summer, keeping the grass short. They come from a nearby riding school.

The creation of an arboretum presented us with unexpected problems. For instance, some areas were too wet to mow or plant. In winter, the trees' roots ended up standing in water. That is why we dig ditches every autumn and have had a number of ponds dug over the years. These fill up with rainwater in winter. As the climate becomes drier and warmer, we now have our own water supply to water young plants.



Fig 3. Digging ditches for drainage



Fig 4. Every tree has a nameplate

Naming

One key request was that all trees and shrubs be provided with a nameplate. Thanks to an engraving machine of our own, we are able to produce nameplates in-house. The plates list the scientific name, French and Dutch names, plant family, year of planting, and country of origin. Of course, the website also features a tree list where the collection is meticulously maintained.

Collection

Currently, there are over 1,600 different taxa. The largest collections include *Spiraea* (approx. 100), *Pinus* (47), *Magnolia* (25), *Aesculus* (31), *Quercus* (61), and *Viburnum* (60).

We offer people the opportunity to plant a tree in honor of a birth, a wedding, or another significant event such as a death. These trees receive an additional plaque bearing the person's name and the occasion. Some friends have scattered the ashes of their deceased loved ones near their favorite tree.

Important goal

We want to share this arboretum with others with the goal of awakening a love of nature in visitors, helping them understand the importance of trees, and allowing them to gain some knowledge about trees. That is why we have made the arboretum interesting for people who don't usually "connect" with trees: there is plenty of art to see, there are signs with photos of animals and trees throughout the arboretum, and information boards with specific details about trees. There is also a permanent photo exhibition of family portraits of 3-4 generations with interesting sayings about their favorite tree (an art project in collaboration with the municipality). There are several attractions for children, including a treasure hunt. And not to be forgotten: a 9-meter-high observation tower. Unfortunately, these days you no longer look out over the treetops in the summer, but right up at them. We also organized annual summer

activities such as the Fête de l'Arbre (6 times), Festival Chorales (2 times), and Festival de la Musique (5 times).



Fig 5. Many small and large sculptures are scattered throughout the grounds



Fig 6. The observation tower is especially popular with visiting school classes

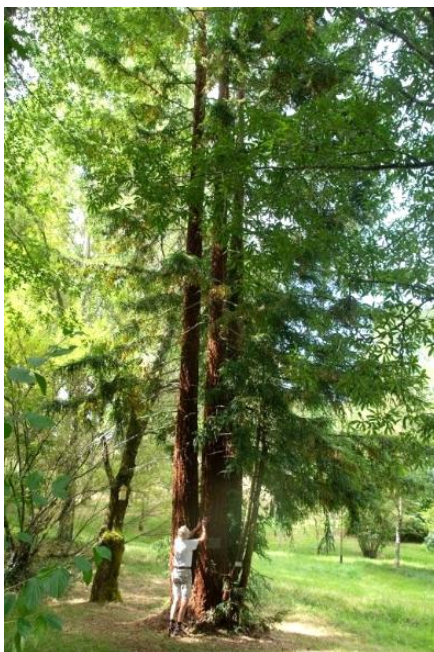
As a result, the arboretum was “discovered” fairly quickly in the region. More and more visitors are coming—now about 1,700 annually. Admission is free, and the gate is always open. Two walking trails of about 45 minutes each have been marked out through the arboretum: one leads past remarkable trees, and the other leads past the art. School field trips are held regularly.

Our reception building is also used by people from the village for special activities such as rehearsals by the village choir, rehearsals by a small music group, French lessons for Dutch and English people, and discussion evenings with film or video.

Friends and Other Support

Almost from the very beginning, friends have come to camp and later stay in one of the houses. In 2025 we celebrated the arboretum’s 35th anniversary in style: at one point, 53 people were staying on the property in cabins, tents, caravans, and RVs.

Many friends enjoy helping out with small and large tasks. And for regular maintenance, we have gardeners on staff two days a week. A good friend does the pruning high up in the trees for a reasonable fee. Without these people, the arboretum would be impossible to maintain!



Very striking

Time and again, we’re amazed at how quickly some trees grow. In about 25–30 years, they’re sometimes already “giants.” No such thing as “tree grows, gardener dies”! Plane trees, giant sequoias, and maples around 30 years old are already quite impressive. And it’s not just the size of many trees that’s impressive; the fall colors are often magnificent too: sugar maples, ginkgos, Japanese maples, and Parrotia make fall a celebration

Fig 7. A ‘family-group’ of *Sequoia sempervirens*, about 30 years old!



Fig 8. Every fall, we enjoy the beautiful colors

Looking back and looking ahead

Through trial and error, we've discovered that developing and maintaining an arboretum requires a great deal of knowledge, work, and time (and money). It's much more than just collecting and planting as many trees as possible. But it's all very much worth it. What a privilege to be able to live here.

If you'd like to read more about this beautiful place or become a 'friend of the arboretum', visit www.tuilliere.nl (sorry, in Dutch or French) Anyone who'd like to stop by is always welcome. The gate is always open, no entrance fee and you can freely walk around.