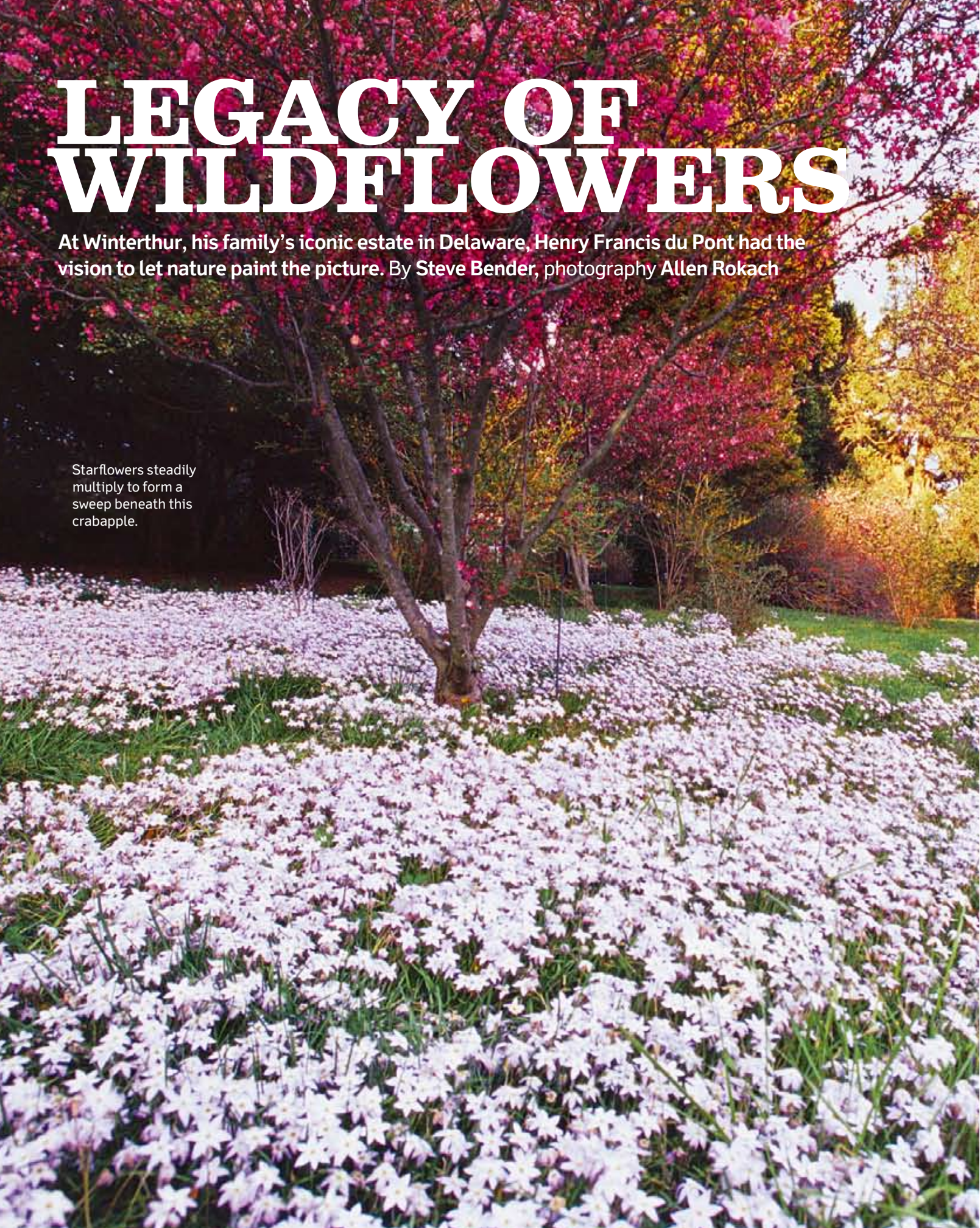


LEGACY OF WILDFLOWERS

At Winterthur, his family's iconic estate in Delaware, Henry Francis du Pont had the vision to let nature paint the picture. By Steve Bender, photography Allen Rokach

Starflowers steadily multiply to form a sweep beneath this crabapple.



YOU'LL LIKELY NEVER OWN a painting by Monet, but in a bucolic sliver of Delaware called Winterthur, you can enter into one. Every spring, God smiles down upon its gardens, and acres of wildflowers and bulbs answer the summons.

A cerulean swath of glory-of-the-snow sparkles on the ground like sapphire hail. White trilliums adorn wooded paths, raising three-part banners to the sun. Waves of countless Italian windflowers roll away to the horizon, gleaming armies of starflowers march on the lawn, and fields of Virginia bluebells vie with the spring sky to claim the truest blue.

This exuberant wonder is unmatched in the South yet enjoyed by too few. People often time their visits to Winterthur to admire azaleas, which typically flower after the wildflowers peak. Each blossom shown on these pages reflects the artistry of a late bloomer himself, who left us proof that nature's unfettered beauty always trumps the heavy handprint of man.

Finding His Way Henry Francis du Pont (1880-1969) seems an improbable visionary. Born and raised at Winterthur, a country estate near Wilmington, he was a sickly child and a poor student, finishing last in his class at the prestigious Groton School. Though he shared his mother's love of horticulture, his lack of drive greatly disappointed his demanding father, H.A. du Pont, a West Point graduate and future U.S. Senator.

In 1902, his father called him home to assume management of Winterthur's grounds after the death of his mother, who had just begun an extensive expansion project on the home. Henry planted his first narcissus bulbs later that year. During the decades to follow, he developed 60 acres of world-class gardens.



In the process to overcome his father's disappointment, Henry Francis du Pont found his passion and created a world-class garden.

The Head Gardener Henry called himself by this title and involved himself in every aspect of planting and design. Visit the gardens today, and you feel his presence as sweeps of flowers sit just where he put them. He planted glory-of-the-snow (*Chionodoxa sardensis*) and Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia pulmonarioides*) in 1903, white trilliums (*Trillium grandiflorum*) in 1905, Italian windflowers (*Anemone apennina*) in 1910, and blue phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) and big merrybells (*Uvularia grandiflora*) in 1912. Several mail-order companies from which he bought plants operate to this day, including Carroll Gardens in Maryland (www.carrollgardens.com) and Gardens of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina (www.gardensoftheblueridge.com).

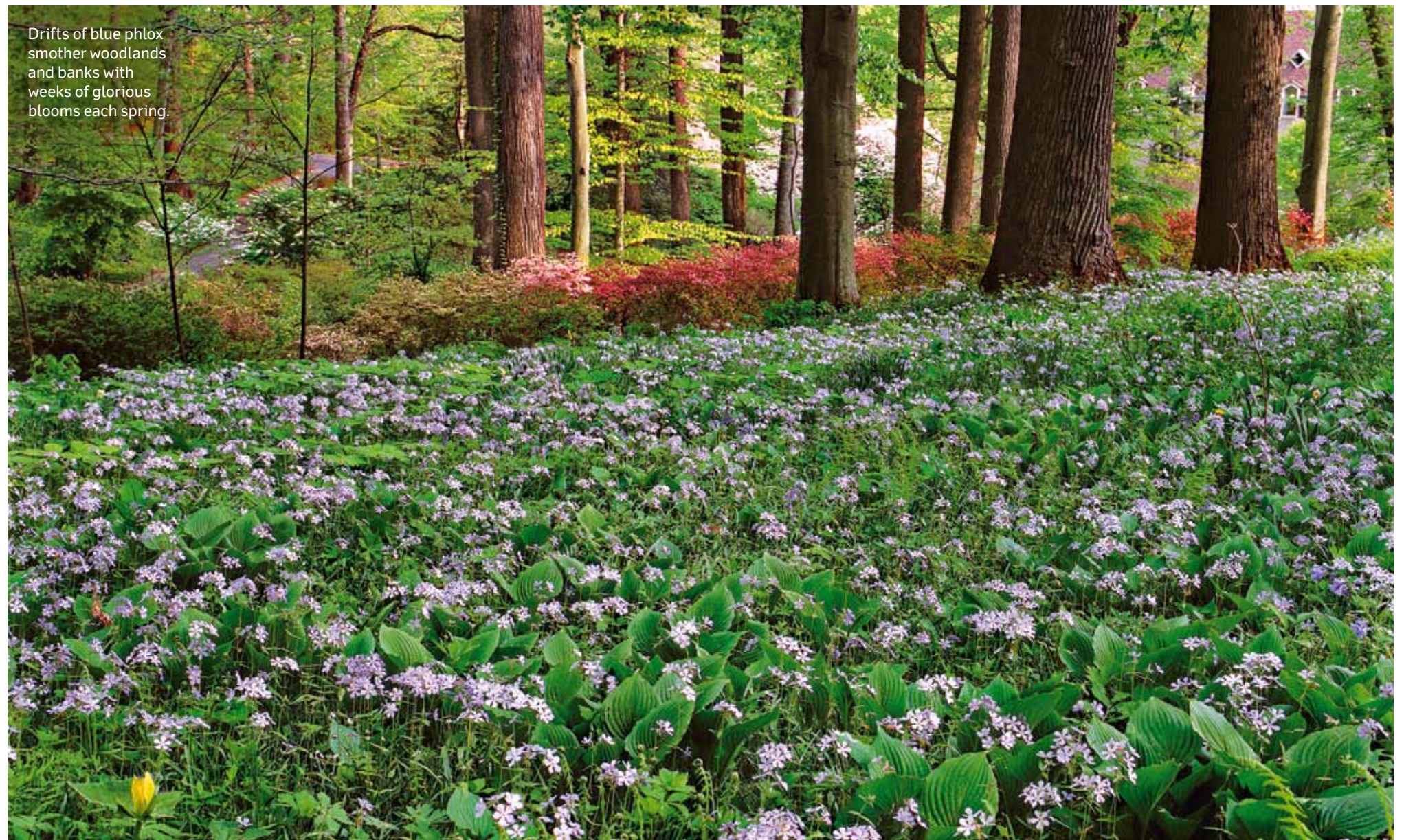
Once established, these sturdy plants pop up every spring and multiply steadily with little care. This makes them excellent choices for beginners. Pretty much all that Winterthur's gardeners do for them is run mulching mowers over fallen autumn leaves annually, covering the dormant plants with finely ground mulch. Blooming commences as early as January and lasts into May, changing color and composition as some flowers come in and others go out. "The beauty of a wild garden," notes Linda Eirhart, curator of plants, "is that every week it looks different."

Guiding Principle A quiet walk past Winterthur's wildflowers reveals the underlying principle governing the grounds: Nature orchestrates; man facilitates. Plantings complement native vegetation and follow the lay of the land, unsullied by incongruous formality and outlandish show.

Du Pont explained his feelings about proper garden design when he wrote, "A good landscape architect's work should fit in so well with the natural landscape that one should hardly be conscious that it has been accomplished."

Though he was unsuccessful at boarding school, du Pont excelled at something much more lasting, something his father could never have dreamed: He showed us a new way to see. ●

WINTERTHUR MUSEUM & COUNTRY ESTATE is located 6 miles northwest of Wilmington at 5105 Kennett Pike (State 52). For information about tours, cost, bloom times, and local lodging and dining, visit www.winterthur.org, or call 1-800-448-3883. Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday.



Drifts of blue phlox smother woodlands and banks with weeks of glorious blooms each spring.



GLORY-OF-THE-SNOW



OXLIP



ITALIAN WINDFLOWER



WHITE TRILLIUM