

Stop 383 Adult Tour – Acer Skutchii, Cool Temperate House

Because the focus of a botanic garden is plants, it's easy to forget that there is a human being behind every plant discovery. This tree, a very close relative of the New England native Sugar maple, is known as the Skutch Maple. It was named after botanist and Baltimore native, Alexander Skutch, who was the first to collect samples of it on a trip to the Cloud Forest Regions of Mexico and Central America in 1934.

Smith Botanic Garden staff collected the seed from which this plant was propagated on a trip to the El Cielo Biosphere Preserve in Mexico. There many trees common to Appalachia, such as maple, hickory, dogwood, walnut, witch hazel and others can be found.

In 1941, Alexander Skutch purchased almost two hundred acres of tropical rainforest in Costa Rica and built a farm called Finca Los Cusingos. His interest switched from the study of plants to the study of birds. Until his death in 2004 at the age of 99, Skutch spent the next 60 years of his life observing the birds that nested in the rain forest and writing dozens of books about them. His farm eventually became a public nature preserve and bird sanctuary, and his life was depicted in the fittingly titled documentary, "A Naturalist in the Rainforest."