These two adjoining greenhouses play musical chairs with the plants at the Botanic Garden. For two weeks in March, they’re overflowing with a big show of colorful tulips, hyacinths, crocuses and dozens of other spring flowering bulbs. Thousands of people, ready for winter to be over, come to see these beautiful blooms. Then in November, “mum’s the word” when the show erupts in a 14 day celebration of spiders, anemones, footballs, and pompons! No, I’m not talking about creatures and sports! Those are the kinds of chrysanthemums on display!

So what happens when the big flower shows aren’t going on? The greenhouses switch to another use. The smaller greenhouse that feels kind of chilly is called… what else, the Cold Storage House! It is kept cool so we can put plants there to slow down their growth while other greenhouses are kept warmer so plants come into bloom more quickly. And depending on what time of year you’re visiting, those rows and rows of pots lined up on the benches are filled with either bulbs for the spring show or chrysanthemums setting their fall buds and being trained to grow in unusual shapes.

The greenhouse closest to the reception area, becomes home to a variety of other plants and seedlings during the rest of the year. It’s called the Physiology House, because one hundred years ago, it was the place where Smith students studied plant physiology. That’s a fancy word meaning the scientific study of how plants function. Can you find the hundred year-old stone workbenches where young women once performed botanical experiments?