

An important update to our dog policy

Effective March 15, 2022: All dogs are required to be on a leash

Dear Brenton Arboretum Members and Friends,

Little did we know, 25 years ago, how appealing our welcoming attitude towards our furry friends would become! Dogs have always been welcome visitors to The Brenton Arboretum, and will continue to be so into the foreseeable future. But, just as the Arboretum's trees have grown, so has our visitation--both the two-legged and four-legged kind.

After much consideration and discussion, the staff and governing board of the Arboretum have decided that it's time to initiate a leash requirement for all visiting dogs to be effective starting March 15, 2022. I know that this will be a deep disappointment to many of our members, but I hope that you'll understand and accept our reasons behind this difficult decision. The two main motivations are 1) visitor safety and 2) wildlife conservation.

Visitor Safety & Comfort

While the abundance of free-range visitors of the tail-wagging variety is a joyful attribute for some Arboretum visitors, it's less so for others. In the past we've always said that "well-behaved" dogs could be off leash, then left it to the owners to decide what well-behaved meant. It's only natural that most dog owners overestimate their canine companion's good manners. While some dogs are very good at commands like sit and stay, most consider those words to be more of an amusing suggestion. We've been extremely lucky that we've never experienced a dog incident with injuries (to humans).

In the vast majority of cases, overly friendly dogs just want to meet and play with other dogs, visitors, or children they don't know. This exuberance can be unwelcome to some and downright terrifying to others. The comfort of all our visitors is one of the main reasons we've decided to put this leash requirement in place.

Wildlife Conservation

The second major reason motivating the Arboretum to initiate this leash requirement is for the sake of our wildlife population. Can you imagine how much fun it is for a dog to run through tall grasses and flush out birds and other wild creatures? Pure bliss!

One or two dogs flushing ground-nesting birds once or twice isn't that big of a deal. But when dozens of dogs do it day after day, those birds will abandon their nests, along with any eggs that might be in it. As much as we love dogs, it goes against our mission and values to leave wildlife at the mercy of their merriment.

Requiring dogs to be on a leash will help protect native ground-nesting birds like quail, prairie chicken, burrowing owls, meadowlarks, ducks, and swans. Protecting and encouraging a thriving population of native birds will help enhance the beauty, value, and experience The Brenton Arboretum offers our visitors, community, and planet.

Thank you for understanding

I dread the disappointment many of you will no doubt feel. We deeply value our members and your generous support. I want to provide the opportunity for you to offer feedback on this policy change. Please feel welcome to reach out by email to mail@thebrentonarboratum.org or by phone at 515-992-4211.

Sincerely,
Melissa Burdick
Executive Director

