

AHS NEWS SPECIAL

National Children & Youth Garden Symposium Goes to Wisconsin

by Katherine Somerville



The Goodman Youth Grow Local Farm will be a destination for the symposium tours.

IN RESPONSE to an increasing need to reconnect children with plants and nature, in 1993 the American Horticultural Society created a symposium focused on how gardens can encourage play, exploration, and beneficial interaction with the natural world. The National Children & Youth Garden Symposium (NCYGS) continues to be the only national professional development event aimed at engaging those who work with—or are interested in work-



ing with—young people in garden settings and other outdoor environments. This year, the 27th annual NCYGS will take place July 10 to 13 in Madison, Wisconsin.

“The Madison area is home to a vibrant, flourishing community network of edu-

cational garden programs at schools, early care and education centers, community gardens, community and youth centers, museums, and nature centers,” says local host **Nathan Larson**, director of the Wisconsin School Garden Network and the Cultivate Health Initiative, a joint project of Community GroundWorks and the Environmental Design Lab at the University of Wisconsin (UW) at Madison. Larson, who has attended NCYGS several times in the past, adds, “We are very excited to host the Symposium this summer in Madison!”

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Climate change, pollinator-species decline, and environmental degradation have become all too familiar subjects in our lives and communities. However, as citizens and as educators, the strategies we deploy, the choices we make, and the values and messages we communicate have the potential for real impact. The focus for the 2019 NCYGS will be about providing the next generation with the knowledge and tools to create a sustainable environmen-

tal future and also about finding ways to maintain and grow the gardens and programs that nurture our youth. This year’s peer-led educational sessions will explore topics such as innovative sustainable gardening curriculum and practices, “green” career resources, and model partnerships for attracting the human, financial, and intellectual capital needed to sustain youth gardening endeavors.

Pashon Murray, environmentalist, entrepreneur, and founder of Detroit Dirt, will give a keynote presentation on her work in waste reduction, recycling, and reuse of materials, especially food waste for compost. Detroit Dirt’s novel closed-loop model—taking food waste, repurposing it, and putting it back into the community—was designed by Murray to help revitalize Detroit and contribute to its urban farming movement.

In 2016, Murray established the Detroit Dirt Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organiza-



Pashon Murray

tion that works on environmental projects through education, research and public programs on sustainable practices and improved waste-to-resources management practices. “I’ve started helping out at public schools and getting them to understand why we need to teach composting to young people,” she says. “They’re going to be managing the future technology in this field. This really is about the next generation.”

A model community, organization, or garden should be both sustainable and resilient. Carrying forward the interest and momentum from NCYGS 2018’s dynamic panel discussion about equitable access to garden spaces and the community forum celebrating the power of nature and plants to heal, this year’s pre-symposium work-

shop explores resilience—looking at food justice through the lens of garden-based education. This workshop will be led by **Amani Olugbala**, community educator at Soul Fire Farm in Grafton, New York. Olugbala combines artistic expression, project-based learning, and outdoor education tools to facilitate social justice-based workshops and discussions with individuals, groups, and organizations. This workshop will be hosted in partnership with Community GroundWorks and Whole Kids Foundation.

THE CITY AND CAMPUS OF MADISON

NCYGS takes place in a different location each year in order to provide participants with the chance to explore new programs and diverse communities. Madison, the capital city of Wisconsin, is an ideal setting for a sustainability-themed NCYGS. Situated between two sparkling lakes, Madison is home to 260 parks, more bikes than cars, and a long list of environmental pioneers like Aldo Leopold, an environmentalist and UW professor who helped create the modern concept of wildlife management.

This year's NCYGS tours will include visits to several of Madison's exemplary sites, among them **Spring Harbor Middle School**. Here, numerous gardens and outdoor learning spaces, including a student-constructed greenhouse, enable



students to conduct research, monitor the environment, and observe the ecological interactions that occur between plants, soil, weather, and animals.

Above: One of the gardens on the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. **Left:** Kids enjoy playtime on the rooftop garden at the Madison Children's Museum.

NCYGS attendees may choose to tour the award-winning **Madison Children's Museum**, which includes the spectacular Rooftop Ramble and the three-season Urb Garden.

Concurrently, a group will tour garden and greenhouse facilities on the UW campus. The botany department's garden and greenhouse feature more than 1,500 species of plants; eight greenhouse rooms take you through a journey of the tropics, desert, bog, and fern forest.

Other participants will have the opportunity to assist with a conservation and restoration project within the **Lakeshore Nature Preserve**, a 300-acre natural area situated on the south shore of Lake Mendota on the UW campus.

The **Troy Kids' Garden**, managed by Community GroundWorks, will host attendees for a special afternoon reception. The garden program provides gardening, arts, nutrition, and environmental education to over 1,000 young people from the Madison area annually, helping them develop a connection with nature that is often difficult to establish in an urban setting.

For additional information about the symposium and to register to attend, visit www.ahsgardening.org/ncygs or send an e-mail to education@ahsgardening.org.

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OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

WEDNESDAY, JULY 10. The University of Wisconsin-Madison's Allen Centennial Garden will host NCYGS attendees for ice cream and casual networking before the main event kicks off. Allen Centennial is the artful living laboratory and public botanical garden of the Horticulture Department and serves as an outdoor classroom for UW-Madison students and the surrounding communities.

SATURDAY, JULY 13. Participants can pay homage to one of Wisconsin's native sons, Frank Lloyd Wright, during a tour of the 800 acres of gardens, farmland, and natural areas around Taliesin, Wright's former home and studio in southwestern Wisconsin. The gardens and natural areas reflect the master architect's profound connection to nature and serve as a stunning backdrop to the building, which is a National Historic Landmark. Following a guided tour of the estate, refreshments will be served on Taliesin's terrace.



—K.S.