

# AHS NEWS SPECIAL: 30th National Children & Youth Garden Symposium

## Lessons from Nature

by Katherine Somerville



**A**FTER TAKING place virtually for the past two years, the National Children & Youth Garden Symposium (NCYGS) returns as an in-person gathering this year from July 13–15 in Richmond, Virginia. In addition to coinciding with the American Horticultural Society’s centennial, this annual event is celebrating its 30th year in 2022. Debuting in 1993, it is the longest-running national professional development event aimed at engaging those who work with young people in garden settings and other outdoor environments.

### NATURE AS HEALER, TEACHER, MENTOR

The global health crisis of the past two years have compelled many Americans to discover and appreciate the beauty and healing power of nature, whether it was spending more time outdoors enjoying open spaces and fresh air or growing our own healthy foods. Nature can also help solve other major challenges that society is facing today, including a growing mental health crisis and climate change.



Keynote speakers Lily Urmann, left, and Carolyn Schuyler, right.



Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond will host the AHS’s 30th symposium in July.

This year’s symposium speakers will explore the topic of nature as healer, teacher, and mentor. Epidemic rates of depression and anxiety point to the need to connect people to restorative green spaces, but many park program planners may be unsure of responsible ways to promote nature as a therapeutic resource. The opening keynote by **Lily Urmann**, a visiting instructor of biomimicry at Pratt Institute, will address biomimetic design and what educators can do to open students’ eyes to the solutions provided by nature. Biomimicry is the practice of learning from nature’s forms, processes, and systems to inspire life-friendly design.

**Carolyn Schuyler**, a psychotherapist and environmental educator, will talk about the practicalities of promoting green spaces as community mental health resources. Both keynotes will also be available as virtual presentations.

### EXPLORING RICHMOND

The NCYGS takes place in a different location each year to enable participants to experience new programs and places. “We’re so excited to be hosting the symposium,” says **Marta Zoellner**, Youth and Family Engagement Manager at **Lewis Ginter**

**Botanical Garden**. “There’s a really strong school and youth gardening scene here in Richmond, and we can’t wait to showcase that for everyone in July.”

In addition to host site Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, attendees will be able to tour nearby **Maymont** and the **Norfolk Botanical Garden**. The **Kent-Valentine House**, headquarters of the Garden Clubs of Virginia, will host a pre-symposium reception and presentation by scholar **Meredith Henne Baker**. Concurrent tours are planned for some of Richmond’s most active school gardens, therapeutic gardens, and community-driven greenspaces.

NCYGS welcomes all garden educators, designers, and program leaders to share ideas and success stories with like-minded individuals. NCYGS is funded in part by generous donations from event sponsors **Ball Horticultural**, **National Garden Clubs, Inc.**, and the **Espoma Company**. For additional information and to register to attend, visit <https://ahsgardening.org/ncygs> or email [education@ahsgardening.org](mailto:education@ahsgardening.org).

*Katherine Somerville is the American Horticultural Society’s associate manager of programs.*

BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY OF LILY URMANN. BOTTOM RIGHT: COURTESY OF CAROLYN SCHUYLER. TOP: COURTESY OF LEWIS GINTER BOTANICAL GARDEN