FOllowing a two-year run as a virtual event during the pandemic, the AHS’s National Children & Youth Garden Symposium (NCYGS) returned as an in-person conference July 13 to 15 in Richmond, Virginia. This annual gathering—which celebrated a landmark 30 years this summer—brings together educators and youth group leaders from around the country working to engage children with gardens and the natural world that surrounds them.

This year’s symposium, hosted by Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, explored the timely topic of nature as healer, teacher, and mentor through keynote addresses, peer-led educational sessions, and field trips to public gardens and school gardens in and around Richmond.

Many symposium participants attended with the assistance of scholarships funded by event sponsor Ball Horticultural Company. Among them was Natalie M. Green, a Community Agriculturalist with the Henrico County Public Schools in Virginia. “I was fortunate to attend the NCYGS through one of their scholarships and I’m so glad I was able to take advantage of the opportunity,” says Green. “Although I am a resident of the Richmond area, I had not had a chance to really explore some of the sites we visited until the symposium. As a new outdoor educator, being able to spend time with my peers from other regions was invaluable for me. I made great connections that I have already followed up with regarding implementing programming this school year. The symposium solidified for me that allowing young people to immerse themselves in nature-based education is not just important, but should be commonplace in all learning environments.”

The NCYGS is funded in part by generous donations from event sponsors Ball Horticultural Company, Boulevard Flower Gardens, VisitRichmondVA.com, National Garden Clubs, Inc. and the Espoma Company.

Symposium participants explored the colorful landscape at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, the event’s host site in Richmond.