

### Youth Garden Symposium in Knoxville

by Courtney Allen

In July 2023, the American Horticultural Society's annual National Children & Youth Garden Symposium (NCYGS) will center on "Cultivating Community," which examines how gardening both relies on and creates community. Hundreds of educators from across the country will unite for four days in Knoxville, Tennessee, to explore ways that community support for youth gardening promotes cultural understanding and accessibility, physical and emotional health, and career and business development for the next generation. This year's symposium is in partnership with the host garden and sponsor, **University of Tennessee Gardens**.

Thirty interactive learning sessions, ranging from basic to advanced topics addressing pre-K–12 learning, will take place at the University of Tennessee (UT) student union. These talks and workshops will include Culturally Inclusive Teaching in the Garden, Anti-Racism and Garden-Based Learning, Social Emotional Learning in the Garden, Horticulture Career Exploration, and Resourcing Our Learning Communities. Presenters represent organizations such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the American Public Gardens Association, and the Plants for Human Health Institute.

In addition to the interactive learning sessions, there will be a keynote talk by **Chris Battle**, founder of **BattleField Farms & Gardens** and a Knoxville community leader. Battle will discuss his journey to create BattleField Farms & Gardens, which addresses food justice issues and provides hundreds of underserved households with garden-grown produce. Attendees will have the opportunity to volunteer on the farm.

Attendees will also have several opportunities to experience the session concepts in applied contexts. This includes staff tours and a reception at University of



**Chris Battle, founder of BattleField Farm & Gardens, will be a symposium keynote speaker.**

Tennessee Knoxville Gardens. UT Gardens is an outdoor laboratory, teaching and research facility, and public garden that tests and evaluates new plants for the ornamental market. There will also be staff tours and a reception at **Knoxville Botanical Garden & Arboretum**, which is located on the former Howell Nurseries and features walking trails, display gardens, and unique historic horticulture.

On Friday morning, attendees will choose between three different Knoxville

excursions. The first option explores the **CAC Beardsley Community Farm** and its work with South Knoxville elementary schools; the second option focuses on two robust school gardening programs in the western reaches of the city; and the third explores urban parks **Ijams Nature Center** and **Lakeshore Park** along the Tennessee River. An additional pre-symposium trip will visit Asheville, North Carolina, to tour the **Biltmore Estate** gardens with the director of horticulture, as well as a visit to the **North Carolina Arboretum**.

The 2023 symposium will offer opportunities to apply new concepts and connect with fellow youth garden educators from diverse regions and communities. Registration is open until late June. To learn more, visit <https://ahsgardening.org/gardening-programs/youth-gardening/ncygs/ncygs-2023>. ■



**NCYGS attendees will be able to tour the UT Knoxville Gardens.**

*Courtney Allen is the director of national programs for the American Horticultural Society.*