

# Youth Garden Symposium in Chicago This Summer

by Courtney Allen



Symposium tour options will include plant restorations along the lakefront of Chicago's North Shore.

In July 2024, the American Horticultural Society's annual National Children & Youth Garden Symposium will center on the theme "Stories in the Garden," which examines how youth can express their narratives through gardening, how gardens can grow stories of personal and community success, and how gardens and literacy efforts can support each other. Hundreds of educators from across the country will unite for four days on Chicago's North Shore to consider how youth gardening and literacy can serve as a framework for career development, curriculum, inclusion, horticulture, and garden programming and funding. This year's symposium is in partnership with the host garden, **Chicago Botanic Garden**.

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Twenty-four interactive learning sessions will take place at the Chicago Botanic Garden ranging from building blocks to advanced topics addressing pre-K–12 learning. These talks and workshops will include topics such as Using Literature to Compose Hands-on Garden Experiences, Exploring Social-Emotional Learning Through Nature-Focused Children's Literature, and A Culture Shift Towards Co-Creation for Inclusive Storytelling. Presenters represent organizations such as the United States Department of Agriculture, KidsGardening, and Green Our Planet, as well as several botanic gardens, universities, schools, and other nonprofits.

In addition to the interactive learning sessions, there will be an opening keynote talk by **Selma Sims**, CEO and Head Grower at Gardeneers, Chicago's only custom full-service school gardens program. Sims will share stories of Chicago's landscape history and how it inspired the creation of Gardeneers; stories about budding horticulturists who learn from Gardeneers; and the story of her own career trajectory. The closing keynote will be delivered by **Amy Koester**, past president of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association. Koester will talk about ALSC's renowned book award program, including the Newbery and Caldecott medals, as well as recommendations for illustrated plant- and garden-themed children's books.



**The English Walled Garden at Chicago Botanic Garden**

**GARDEN VISITS AND EXCURSIONS**

Attendees will also have opportunities to experience the session concepts in applied contexts through visits to the area’s notable gardens. This includes tours at Chicago Botanic Garden, one of the world’s great living museums and conservation science centers. The campus offers 27 gardens and four natural areas and is situated on 385 acres on and around nine islands, with six miles of lake shoreline.

On Wednesday afternoon, attendees will choose between three different North Shore excursions. The first option explores two city-operated nature centers with renowned youth programming; the second option explores two lakeshore beaches undergoing plant restoration efforts; and the third explores two public schools with exemplary gardening programs. An additional pre-symposium trip will visit the **Ball Horticultural Company** campus and the **Morton Arboretum**.

The 2024 National Children & Youth Garden Symposium will offer opportunities to apply new concepts and connect with fellow youth garden educators from a diversity of communities. Come for the fun and learn skills, ideas, contacts, and resources to bring back to your own community! Registration is open until late June. To learn more, visit: <https://ahsgardening.org/gardening-programs/youth-gardening/ncygs/ncygs-2024>. ■

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

**THE JULIA RAPPAPORT GROWING GARDENERS FUND**

We are pleased to announce a new grant program for youth gardens. The Julia Rappaport Growing Gardeners Fund provides \$1,000 to \$2,000 annually to one educator to start or expand a garden or gardening science project at their school or community. The grant aims to increase access to hands-on gardening experiences for children of all ages and from all backgrounds. The first grant recipient will be announced at AHS’s annual National Children & Youth Garden Symposium in July.

This grant is supported by a donation from Thomas Byrd and Valerie Rappaport and their family in honor of Valerie’s mother Julia Rappaport, a former AHS board member and long-time member of AHS, who loved gardening, science, and education.

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