

THE AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY'S 33rd ANNUAL NCYGS



NATIONAL CHILDREN & YOUTH GARDEN SYMPOSIUM

JULY 8-11, 2025 • HARTFORD, CT
AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY



AMERICAN
HORTICULTURAL
SOCIETY

SCIENCE & HISTORY IN YOUTH GARDENING

This year, the American Horticultural Society's National Children & Youth Garden Symposium explores science and history in youth gardening. From July 8-11 in Hartford, Connecticut, hundreds of educators from around the country will unite to explore how gardens serve as vital educational tools for conveying scientific concepts and preserving landscapes and culture. Leveraging a proven train-the-trainer model, the Symposium will feature interactive learning sessions covering a range of topics suitable for pre-K through 12th grade learning. Personalized visits to the area's impressive and relevant gardens will offer opportunities to apply new concepts and connect with fellow youth garden educators from communities across the country. Come for the fun and learn skills, ideas, contacts, and resources to bring back to your own community!

Symposium Headquarters Connecticut Science Center

The Connecticut Science Center is a hub for science, innovation, and learning, dedicated to sparking curiosity and inspiring discovery in people of all ages. Opened in 2009 and located in Hartford, the Science Center offers dynamic exhibits, hands-on activities, and unique educational programs that empower learners to explore the wonders of STEM. Committed to fostering equity and accessibility, the Science Center is a valuable educational resource, engaging diverse audiences through school district and community partnerships and providing immersive informal learning experiences and educator professional development. Whether supporting families, students, teachers, or local business leaders, the Connecticut Science Center offers opportunities to connect with science in meaningful ways, fueling the passion for exploration and the pursuit of knowledge.



Conference attendees will have full access to the Center's exhibits on July 9 and July 11, as well as special access to the Butterfly Encounter and a tour of the Nassau Science Plaza's native pollinator gardens.

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

	MORNING	LUNCH	AFTERNOON
TUESDAY, JULY 8 (PRE-SYMPOSIUM TRIP)	Elizabeth Park Tour	Lunch at Elizabeth Park	Mark Twain House Tour
WEDNESDAY, JULY 9	Opening Keynote, Awards Presentation, Plaza Garden Tours, and Gallery Exploration	Lunch at the Connecticut Science Center	Block A Sessions & Block B Sessions
THURSDAY, JULY 10 (FIELD TRIPS)	Breakfast at DoubleTree Hotel, College Student Farm Tours	Lunch on own in historic college towns	College Botanic Garden Tours
FRIDAY, JULY 11	Closing Keynote and Block C Sessions	Lunch at the Connecticut Science Center	Block D Sessions and Gallery Exploration

MOBILE WEBSITE & MESSAGING

The AHS NCYGS webpage is mobile-compatible for on-the-go use during the symposium. Registrants will also be provided at check-in with a code to sign up for event text alerts. These texts provide important real-time updates from the event organizer throughout the symposium.

WIFI ACCESS

The Connecticut Science Center provides complimentary public wifi.

GET SOCIAL

Tag your posts with #NCYGS2025 on social media to follow along and share your favorite symposium moments!



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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Rebecca McMackin

Ecological
Horticulturist and
Garden Designer



Sefra Alexandra

Founder,
The Seed Huntress



Introducing Children to their Plant Neighbors

Many of us remember holding buttercups to our chins as children, only to find that yes, indeed, we all love butter. Or marveling at the central “drop of blood” in Queen Anne’s Lace. These stories are so powerful that children pass them to each other unencouraged, as ways of knowing the plants around them. This lecture will propose new stories for children, those of native plants and their delightful, mysterious, or even morbid behaviors, with the hope that we can familiarize little ones with more of the flowers and trees of their communities.

Rebecca McMackin is an ecologically obsessed horticulturist and garden designer. She is Arboretum Curator for Woodlawn Cemetery, managing one of the best tree collections in New York. She spent a decade as Director of Horticulture of Brooklyn Bridge Park, where she managed 85 acres of diverse parkland organically. Their research into cultivating urban biodiversity and ethical management strategies has influenced thousands of people and entire urban parks systems to adopt similar approaches. McMackin writes, lectures, and teaches on ecological landscape management and pollination ecology, as well as designs the rare public garden. She has been published by and featured in The New York Times, the Landscape Institute, on NPR and PBS, and somehow gave a TED talk. She holds MScs from Columbia University and University of Victoria in landscape design and biology and recently completed the Loeb Fellowship at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Seed Hunting, Ethnobotany, & Ecological Restoration for Children & Youth

Seed hunting, ethnobotany, and ecological restoration offer children and youth a powerful connection to the natural world. This keynote explores how the ancient practice of seed collection can inspire a sense of wonder, stewardship, and cultural appreciation. By blending hands-on exploration with stories of plants’ roles in human history, participants learn how native seeds and traditional knowledge can restore ecosystems and strengthen communities. Together, we can empower the next generation to become guardians of biodiversity and champions of ecological resilience.

Sefra Alexandra – the Seed Huntress- is the Ecological Health Network Education Coordinator for the Northeast USA Bioregion. She leads The Ecotype Project, teaching smallholder farmers how to produce autochthonous plant material for ecological restoration. These efforts have led to the formation of the farmer-led Northeast Seed Collective, making ecotypic seed commercially available. In 2020 she began BOATanical.org where she guides ‘backyard’ expeditions to plant native plants by boat along riparian corridors, an experience that contributes to a culture of citizen science and ecological stewardship. Sefra is on the board of the Freed Seed Federation and the steering committee of the Northeast Seed Network. She holds a MAT in agroecological education from Cornell University and is trained in the tradition of seed saving by the Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance. She is also a WINGS WorldQuest expedition flag carrier, member of the Explorers Club, former Genebank Impacts Fellow for the Global Crop Diversity Trust has helped to fortify community seed banks on island nations with Tactivate- the disaster response company she runs with her twin brother.

HIGHLIGHTS

JULIA RAPPAPORT GROWING GARDENERS FUND

The American Horticultural Society is pleased to offer a grant program for youth garden funding. The Julia Rappaport Growing Gardeners Fund provides \$1,000 – \$2,000 annually to one educator to start or expand a garden or gardening science project at their school or community. The grant is intended to increase access to hands-on gardening and gardening science for youth and to foster a lifelong passion for gardening, the natural world, and horticulture in children from all backgrounds. The 2024-2025 award winner was the Curley K-8 School in Boston, MA. The 2025-2026 award winner will be announced at the 2025 Symposium. This grant is supported by a donation from Thomas Byrd and Valerie Rappaport and their family in honor of Valerie's mother, Julie Rappaport, a former AHS board member and long-time member of AHS, who loved gardening, science, and education.

GROWING GOOD KIDS BOOK AWARDS

The recipients of the 2024 "Growing Good Kids — Excellence in Children's Literature" awards will be announced at the Symposium. Presented jointly by the National Junior Master Gardener Program and the American Horticultural Society, these awards recognize engaging and inspiring works of plant-, garden-, and ecology-themed children's literature. The Growing Good Kids — Excellence in Children's Literature awards are presented annually to qualifying titles published in the previous year.

JANE L. TAYLOR AWARD RECIPIENT:

**Amy
Padolf**



The American Horticultural Society's Jane L. Taylor Award recognizes an individual, organization, or program that has inspired and nurtured future horticulturalists through efforts in children's and youth gardening.

This year, AHS is proud to honor Amy Padolf with the Jane L. Taylor Award, part of the AHS's annual Great American Gardener Awards. Amy is the Director of Education at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, where she leads comprehensive plant science education programs for students from pre-kindergarten to post-graduate levels. Throughout her career, she has pioneered innovative educational initiatives that bridge research and education. Notably, she directs the award-winning Fairchild Challenge, which annually engages over 125,000 students in STEM-based programs. Padolf's achievements include launching the Million Orchid Project, the nation's largest educational outreach program dedicated to orchid conservation, and collaborating with NASA on Growing Beyond Earth, an international project supporting indoor agriculture. She has also established the nation's first botany-focused magnet schools and created a makerspace for food production technology. As a respected leader, Padolf has shared her expertise globally, including as a keynote speaker at the 8th Global Botanic Garden Congress in Singapore. She holds degrees in Rhetoric and Science Education and is pursuing a Ph.D. in Education Research.

PRE-SYMPOSIUM OPPORTUNITY

Elizabeth Park and Mark Twain House

Tuesday, July 8, 9:45 a.m. – 5:15 p.m.

Additional registration required. Transportation provided to/from DoubleTree Hilton. Lunch provided.



Elizabeth Park

Opened in 1897, Elizabeth Park is the horticultural gem of the Hartford park system, with its many gardens, sweeping vistas, notable trees, and greenhouses. It is home to the first municipal rose garden in the United States, which is also the third largest rose garden in the country today. Additional highlights in the park's 102 acres include the annual garden, perennial garden, rock garden, horticultural gardens, and ponds and bridges. Our tour will explore the science of horticulture at this historic landscape.



Mark Twain House

Mark Twain changed the way the world sees America and the way Americans see themselves. The Mark Twain House continues the conversation he began. Founded in 1929 and operating as a public museum since 1974, the Mark Twain House & Museum celebrates the life and legacy of Samuel L. Clemens as one of our nation's defining cultural figures. The museum serves the public by preserving the historic Mark Twain House which has been meticulously restored over a period of many years and is designated a National Historic Landmark. The Museum also offers exhibitions and numerous educational and cultural programs for students, teachers, and the public.

When the Clemens family lived on the property, there was a large greenhouse on the lawn between their house and the home of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Today, the Mark Twain House gardens and conservatory are under the watchful care of University of Connecticut Master Gardeners. For over a decade they have worked with the plantings and landscaping on the grounds, combining a staggering amount of horticultural skill with an artist's eye, and creatively incorporating historical hints and tributes into their work.

FIELD EXPERIENCES

Thursday, July 10

Select **one** of the following tours to get a closer look at top university gardens and farms in New England and to learn about their work with the local youth.

Included in full symposium and Thursday one-day registration. Bus transportation provided between DoubleTree hotel and field sites. Breakfast provided at DoubleTree hotel.

Field Trip #1: Connecticut Coast

8:30 a.m – 5 p.m

Sprout Garden at Connecticut College

Sprout Garden is a cohesive and shared community that provides social and educational spaces in which students can practice gardening and gain hands-on experience with sustainable, small-scale agriculture. The garden strives to build community and empower individuals by planting, growing, and eating ethically produced food. Sprout Garden builds opportunities for hands-on growing in the greater community, provides experiential education in small-scale agriculture and local food systems, and increases the town's food resilience.



Bus will take attendees between sites and the historic town of New London for lunch. There are many restaurants to select from and lunch is on your own.

Connecticut College Arboretum

The Connecticut College Arboretum provides a welcome connection with the natural world, offering opportunities for teaching, research, conservation, public education, and recreation. The Connecticut College Arboretum is made up of 750 acres of landscaped campus grounds and Greenhouse, the Native Plant Collection, Caroline Black Garden, natural areas including Mamacoke Island and Bolleswood, and managed landscapes. The Arboretum serves a multitude of functions for the College and the greater New London Community, providing a welcome connection with the natural world and a place to get away for recreation and reflection. The Connecticut College Arboretum participates in the AHS Garden Network.

Field Trip #2: Pioneer Valley

8:15 a.m – 5 p.m

UMass Student Farm

Part of the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, UMass Student Farm is the primary hands-on learning lab for sustainable food and farming majors. The UMass Student Farm consists of twenty acres and provides produce for a campus CSA, a café, the university dining services, two supermarkets, and the UMass Student Farmers Market. Student Farmers take the lead on planning the season, working the land, and harvesting and marketing the produce. The university owns and manages several agricultural research and production farms in local Massachusetts communities, including fruit-tree orchards, grape vineyards, and a cranberry station.



Bus will take attendees between sites and the historic town of Northampton for lunch. There are many restaurants to select from and lunch is on your own.

Smith College Botanic Garden

The Botanic Garden of Smith College fosters environmental and social justice through teaching and learning about plants, people and place. The Garden does this through curating plant collections, training students, helping teachers, welcoming visitors, and cultivating spaces and landscapes. The Botanic Garden of Smith College spans 127 acres and includes the 12,000 square foot Lyman Conservatory, Church Gallery, arboretum and many outdoor gardens. The garden was founded by Smith College's first president, Laurenus Clarke Seelye, so that the entire campus could be of scientific, as well as aesthetic, value. Today, it continues to meet those goals. The Botanic Garden of Smith College participates in the AHS Garden Network.

FIELD EXPERIENCES

Field Trip #3: New Haven

8:45 a.m – 5 p.m

Yale Farm

Endearingly known as “the Old Acre,” the Yale Farm is a lively acre of land where students care for plants and animals to enrich their studies and explore the relationships between

food, farming, people, and planet. The Yale Farm is a lush and productive academic farm that produces dozens of varieties of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers, and is home to free-range laying hens and honeybees. Throughout the year, students, faculty, staff, and members of the New Haven community visit the Yale Farm to study the connection between land and food. The Farm employs growing practices and crop rotations that reflect our regional and national agricultural landscape. The Yale Farm strives to be a working model of agricultural approaches that students can participate in directly, including through classes with local schools and city farmers markets.



Bus will take attendees between sites and to the New Haven Green Historic District for lunch. There are many restaurants to select from and lunch is on your own.

Marsh Botanic Garden at Yale University

Marsh Botanical Garden’s mission is to develop and maintain well curated collections, outdoor gardens, state-of-the-art plant growth facilities in support of research, teaching for Yale faculty and students, as well as informative and inspirational experience for visitors. Sitting on eight acres, with six greenhouses comprising around a third of an acre under glass, Marsh Botanical Garden offers support for researchers, faculty and students at Yale, as well as an informative and eye-catching experience for visitors. In the summer, the naturalistic beds and wildflower plantings provide color and attract birds and butterflies. In addition to offering tours to local schools, Marsh Botanical Garden engages the public in participation and community science projects.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Tuesday July 8, 2025

Pre-Symposium Tour

Additional registration required. Transportation provided to/from DoubleTree Hilton. Lunch provided.

- 8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.
- Registration check-in at hotel for pre-symposium tour
- 9:30 a.m. – 5:15 p.m.
- Pre-symposium tour

Wednesday July 9, 2025

Symposium Day 1

Connecticut Science Center. Lunch provided.

- 8 a.m. – 9 a.m.
- Registration check-in at Connecticut Science Center
- 9 a.m. – 10 a.m.
- Welcome and Opening Keynote: Rebecca McMackin
- 10 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
- Presentation of Awards
- 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m.
- Tours of Plaza Gardens and Gallery Exploration
- 12 p.m. – 1 p.m.
- Lunch
- 1:15 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.
- Session Block A
- 3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- Session Block B

Session Block A		
TITLE	LEAD PRESENTER	ROOM NAME
SOS – Save Our Seeds/Save Our Stories	Ginger Anderson, Jimena Espinoza Mika Bishton, Tricia Betterly	Discovery Center Lab 1 (Level G1)
Honorable Harvest – Collecting and Growing Native Seeds with Students	Haley Diem	Discovery Center Lab 2 (Level G1)
Exploring Plants with Science Tools and Practices	Grace Anderson, Lilly Andersen	Discovery Center Lab 3 (Level G1)
Planning and Implementing an Intergenerational Food Sovereignty Education Program at a Community Garden	Scott Morrison, Ashlie Thomas, Emily Ecker	Discovery Center Community Room (Level G1)
Northern Neighbours: Cultivating Free, Inclusive, Equity-Based, Child-Informed Garden Programs in Hamilton's Industrial Heartland	Hazel Cho, Victoria Bick, Marc Pinaid-Brown	Science Theater (Lobby Level)
The People and Plants Behind the Greatest Advancements in Botany	Dr. Pamela Blanchard, Dr. Mary Legoria	Discovery Center Lab 4 (Level G1)

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Session Block B

TITLE	LEAD PRESENTER	ROOM NAME
From Seed to Story: Cultivating Learning Through Garden Journals	Rick Perillo	Discovery Center Lab 4 (Level G1)
Herbal Allies: Nurturing Wellness and Wisdom in the Garden	Ashley Rouse	Discovery Center Lab 1 (Level G1)
STEM in Youth Horticulture	Shelley Mitchell	Discovery Center Lab 3 (Level G1)
Cultivating Independence: Gardening Practices & Life Skills for Diverse Learners	Pamia Coleman, Latiayna Tabb, MS	Discovery Center Lab 2 (Level G1)
Maple in the Classroom: Inspiring Sweet Cross-Curricular Connections	Margaret Donnan, Casey Withers, Vada Boback	Discovery Center Community Room (Level G1)

Thursday July 10, 2025

Symposium Day 2

Transportation provided to/from DoubleTree Hilton. Breakfast provided.

Field Trip #1: Connecticut Coast

8:30 a.m.	Bus Pick Up at Hotel
10 a.m – 11:30 a.m	Connecticut College Student Farm Tour
12 p.m – 1:30 p.m	Lunch
2 p.m – 3:30 p.m	Connecticut College Arboretum Tour
3:30 p.m	Depart for Hotel

Field Trip #2: Pioneer Valley

8:15 a.m.	Bus Pick Up at Hotel
10 a.m – 11:30 a.m	UMass Student Farm Tour
12 p.m – 1:30 p.m	Lunch
2 p.m – 3:30 p.m	Smith College Botanic Garden Tour
3:30 p.m	Depart for Hotel

Field Trip #3: New Haven

8:45 a.m.	Bus Pick Up at Hotel
10 a.m – 11:30 a.m	Yale Student Farm Tour
12 p.m – 1:30 p.m	Lunch
2 p.m – 3:30 p.m	Marsh Botanic Garden Tour at Yale University
3:30 p.m	Depart for Hotel



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Friday July 11, 2025

Symposium Day 3

Connecticut Science Center. Lunch provided.

9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.	Session Block C
11 a.m. – 12 p.m.	Closing Keynote: Sefra Alexandra
12 p.m. – 1 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 – 2:15 p.m.	Session Block D
2:15 – 5 p.m.	Gallery Exploration

Session Block C

TITLE	LEAD PRESENTER	ROOM NAME
LEEDing the Way: Creating Interactive STEM Field Trips for Middle and High School Students	Kaylan Amaya	Discovery Center Lab 3 (Level G1)
Empowering the Future: Training Latinx Community Leaders for Climate Leadership and Change	Claudia Damiani, Rosa Maria Gordillo	Science Theater (Lobby Level)
Tracking Impact: Sustaining the Dirt Girls Program	Carrie Strohl	Discovery Center Lab 2 (Level G1)
Farm to Table Engagement for our Smallest Gardeners	Anne Murray-Randolph	Discovery Center Lab 4 (Level G1)
A Native Florida Approach to Youth Gardening	Jessie Wingar	Discovery Center Lab 1 (Level G1)

Session Block D

TITLE	LEAD PRESENTER	ROOM NAME
Partnering for STEM/STEAM Success: A Blueprint for Certification Using the Georgia STEM/STEAM Continuum	Cameron Anderson	Science Theater (Lobby Level)
Nurturing Interest, Cultivating Commitment: The Junior Botanist/Plant Investigator Program at Brooklyn Botanic Garden	Ashley Gagnay	Discovery Center Lab 3 (Level G1)
School Garden Management 101	Ashley Rouse	Discovery Center Lab 2 (Level G1)
Cultivating Partnerships for Inclusive Learning in Garden Spaces	Emma Walter, Ann Halley	Discovery Center Lab 1 (Level G1)
Diving into Water-wise Gardening	Em Shipman	Discovery Center Lab 4 (Level G1)

HARTFORD INFORMATION

Hartford brims with universities, historic sites, museums, green spaces, riverfront, and thriving businesses. At the intersection of major travel routes, Hartford is also an excellent gateway to the quaint villages, cool weather, hardy gardens, and summertime beauty of New England.

The Connecticut Science Center and the DoubleTree by Hilton Hartford Downtown are only half-a-mile apart, with dozens of attractions, entertainment, and restaurants within a few blocks of both. For those who would like to take transit between the hotel and science center, the free Hartford Dash Shuttle has stops at both locations and circulates every 15 minutes between 7am-7pm.

Hartford Attractions:

XL Center
Hartford Stage
Dunkin' Park
TheaterWorks Hartford
Bushnell Park



Hartford Restaurant Recommendations

BREAKFAST:

Herb N' Kitchen
New York Deli & More
the BOP Coffee
Bloom Bake Shop
Starbucks

DINNER:

Hartford Flavor Cocktail Parlor
Vaughan's Public House
Urban Lodge Brewing
Sunberry Cafe
XL Center Sportsbook
Agave Grill
RAW*
Sorella
Feng Chophouse
Trumbull Kitchen
The Brownstone
Max Downtown

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