

# Garden Club of New Jersey



Dear Garden Club of New Jersey Members,

Concerning fall and winter in our gardens, to quote Lorene Edwards Forkner's article from "*Garden Rant*" -- "My garden is parched and defeated. And so am I." Okay, so how many of us are done with gardening by the end of the season? Let's be honest! Yet each year we forget about all the work involved and do it all over again and anticipate recreating our garden in the springtime.



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Cecelia Millea who did a wonderful tribute design for me entitled, "*Hive Heaven*". Thank you, Cecelia, it was a delight!

I just got back from the CAR- SGC Conference in Cambridge, Maryland, and was so inspired by all the attendees. The location on the Chesapeake Bay was outstanding with sunrise over the water each morning. Several of our New Jersey members completed the Tri Refresher course and I really want to acknowledge

Now, a little bit about the conference. The speakers and floral designers covered an array of topics. Creating Water Smart Landscapes, Floral Designer Neal Sanders was very funny and delighted us with antidotes. He did 15 designs and then raffled them off. No words can describe how stunning his designs were. Another speaker talked about Longwood Gardens. We also learned about the high tides in Dorchester and how that area of Dorchester is disappearing, with rising sea levels.

As the president of the Garden Club of New Jersey, I was thrilled to receive seven awards from CAR SGC. 1. First Place for a Large Club Civic Development and Improvement with \$100 for West Trenton GC. 2. Overall winner and \$50 for a Flower Show Schedule Award, for GC of Montclair. 3. Overall winner and \$50 for a Flower Show Schedule Award for Long Valley GC. 4. Yearbook Award --70-99 members, First Place for Rockaway Valley GC. 5. Youth Excellence Award

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and \$50 for GC of Fair Haven. 6. Perennial Bloom Award for Shirley Robinson. 7. A \$2,000 scholarship awarded to Leo T. Davis, attending Rowan University, John H. Martinson Honors College.

A reminder to all club presidents: Apply for a Presidential Grant. I am offering three \$1,000 grants this year. The theme is “The Importance of Pollinators—Go Native.” Description: Establish a program (or garden) that promotes and encourages protecting our pollinators and using native plants. Grant Application is due to the GCNJ Awards Chairperson by February 15. It is easy to apply. Limit your information to three pages. Click on the application link below to get started.

<https://www.gardenclubofnewjersey.org/wpcontent/uploads/2025/07/Presidents-Project-Application-2025-2027.pdf>.

Share your successes with us so that we can all grow in the extent of our knowledge.

Warmly,

Sue Berdahl, GCNJ President

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## **PLANT-A-TREE (FORMERLY PENNY PINES)**

For many years, National Garden Clubs, Inc., and USDA Forest Service have maintained a partnership sustaining our national forests through the PLANT-A-TREE program.

Your garden club can participate in a meaningful conservation project where all contributions help the Forest Service to plant trees across the national forest system wherever restoration is needed, places most impacted by wildfires, flooding, drought, and other disturbances.

Penny Pines now has a new name, “PLANT-A-TREE”. Its updated name reflects the program’s missions and reaches a wider audience.

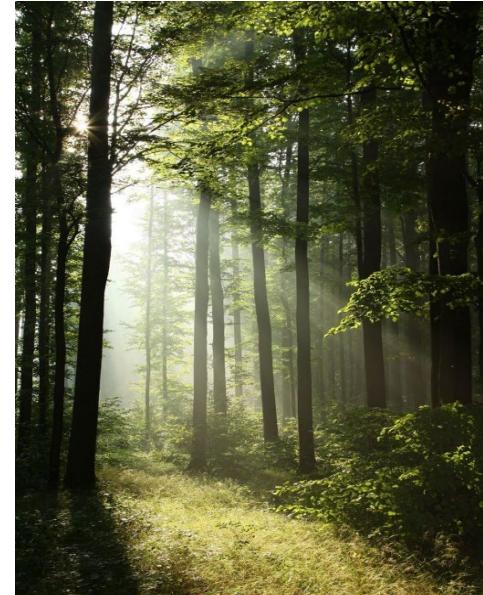
When choosing to participate, your donations go to where it is most needed, or you may select a National Forest. The Forest Service reserves the right to utilize the funds based on need. Individual plantings will not be identified per donor.

Certificates will be sent digitally to the email supplied on the donation form and contributions may be a minimum of \$50.00 or as large as \$10,000. The form for donations is below. Contact Susan O’Donnell, GCNJ “PLANT-A-TREE” Chairman, at [greenthumbsfo@gmail.com](mailto:greenthumbsfo@gmail.com) if you have any questions. Please notify me of any donations that are made.

Please click on following link to find more information about Plant-A-Tree and how you can donate.

[Plant-A-Tree | National Garden Clubs, Inc.](https://www.gardenclubs.org/plant-a-tree)

**Susan O’Donnel**  
**Chair, Plant-A-Tree**



## Drumthwacket December Tour

Drumthwacket is the official residence of the governor of the state of New Jersey, near the state capital of Trenton. The mansion was built in 1835 and expanded in 1893 and 1900. It was sold with the surrounding land to the state in 1966.



The mansion is open in December each year for the public to view six first-floor public rooms festively decorated by Garden Club of New Jersey. It is a self-guided tour, but docents are available in every room to answer questions. This is a very busy and special year at Drumthwacket. The holiday décor will nod to the American Revolution to kick off the celebration of the United States' Semi-quincentennial,

the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing

of the Declaration of Independence. A production company was hired by Mrs. Murphy to assist the clubs as they work with this theme. They have assigned battle themes to each room, somewhat related to the decorating club. The garden clubs participating this year are

**Essex Fells, Keyport, Metuchen, Mountain Lakes, Seaweeders, Warren, and West Trenton.**

In addition to the usual eight areas to be decorated, there is a **new space** this year. The beautiful **Van Nys Barn**, a free-standing entertaining venue, will be decorated with garlands and a 6' diameter wreath.



Visitors may tour Drumthwacket during Holiday Open House dates in December. The dates will be posted in November on [www.drumthwacket.org](http://www.drumthwacket.org). The open houses are free and open to the public but visitors must pre-register online. If you have a question, please email [info@drumthwacket.org](mailto:info@drumthwacket.org) or call 973-204-2860.

Nancy Bigelsen  
Chair- Drumthwacket  
[snrbig2@gmail.com](mailto:snrbig2@gmail.com)



## FLOWER SHOW SCHOOL IV

### April 2026

On April 11, 2026, we will be conducting a Zoom online Flower Show Procedure for School IV from noon to 3 PM.

On April 14, 2026, we will be studying hellebores as well as collections and displays, with Heidi Muschick as our instructor.

On April 15, 2026, we will be studying abstract and reflective designs with Carol English, as our instructor.

The exam will be on Thursday, April 16.

Learning about flower shows, horticulture, and design is an exciting journey. Please join us. You can begin the journey to become a judge, just attend to learn more, or attend to attain knowledge to better your club's flower shows. You will not regret it.

Registration information is on the GGNJ website, or you can use the link to register that is below. Register now, via our Zeffy online site.

<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/flower-show-school-iv>



*Crawford's Corner*

## Virginia Sweetspire – ‘A Handsome Flowerg Shrub’

It is rare for an easily grown shrub with multiple seasons of interest to be seen in the home landscape. Oddly, this has been the fate of Virginia Sweetspire. Seemingly unknown in the 1980’s, it began to gain some recognition in the early 1990’s. Indeed, our native Sweetspire, botanically named *Itea virginica* (**pictured below**), appears to be a ‘late bloomer’ to the gardening world. Yet oddly, it was well admired in the 1700’s! Apparently, it was lost in the wave of new introductions during the nineteenth century and is a plant in need of rediscovery!

*Itea virginica* is a member of the Iteaceae or Sweetspire Family and contains ten species, nine of which are native to portions of Eastern Asia. The genus name was penned in 1753 by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) and stems from the Greek *Ítea* meaning willow, a reference to its long, willow-like foliage. The species epithet is an homage to the area in which it was originally discovered by John Bartram (1699-1777). Bartram lived outside of Philadelphia and traveled extensively throughout Eastern North America in search of new plants. To help offset his expenses, he often sold plants and seeds to individuals of wealth in Europe. Prior to Linnaeus even describing the plant, its seasonal interest appealed to the Scottish politician Archibald Campbell, the Third Duke of Argyl (1682-1761) and appeared in his garden in 1744!



In Bartram’s 1792 plant catalogue, produced by John’s son William, Virginia Sweetspire was described as ‘*a handsome flowerg shrub*’. Granted, the spelling may not reflect current standards, but the description is most appropriate. *Itea virginica* is a multistemmed, suckering shrub, growing naturally in moist to wet soils along streams, ponds, and in sandy Pine Barren communities. It is native from southern New Jersey south to Florida and west to the Mississippi River Valley and southern Illinois. In sunny locations, the plant forms a dense thicket with stems reaching 4-6’ tall with the suckering rootstock slowly spreading to widths of 8-10’. In heavily shaded sites, the plants are far less dense and can stretch to upwards of 10’ tall.

Come spring, the plants slowly leaf out in early May with the foliage initially bearing a light green color before developing the deeper green tones of summer. The willow-like foliage is linear to elliptical, measuring  $\frac{3}{4}$ -1” wide by 1½-4” long and is tapered at either end. Starting in late May through mid-June, numerous short leafy stems give rise to pendant, 3-6” long by  $\frac{3}{4}$ -1” wide floral racemes, each radially clothed in 5 petaled white flowers measuring  $\frac{1}{2}$ ” in diameter (**as seen above and at right**). The racemes are ornamental when the flowers are in the bud stage but, they really shine when they open fully. True to the common name, the flowers yield a light yet pleasant fragrance.



The flower buds develop on stems produced the previous year and any significant pruning is best completed immediately after flowering to prevent the removal of flower buds. Fortunately, pruning is usually not needed outside of removing the occasional declining stem. If you wish to renew a colony, cutting the clump to the ground in late winter is best, although that will also eliminate the flower display for the coming year. Come mid to late October, the deep green foliage turns into a breathtaking brilliant red to reddish purple fall color, as illustrated in the **image to the right** of 'Henry's Garnet'.



Although Virginia Sweetspire is normally found in moist soils in shaded environments, the plant is amazingly tolerant of varying conditions and will thrive in full sun in soils of average moisture. It is also very pH tolerant, growing well in soil from a pH of 5.0 to near 7.0. Plants are typically hardy to zone 6, although some forms grow best in zone 7 or warmer.

One of the most attractive and hardy selections has proven to be 'Henry's Garnet'. Henry refers to Mrs. Mary G. Henry (1884-1967), a plant collector and Founder of the Henry Foundation for Botanical Research. She discovered the plant near Sharpsburg, Georgia, in November of 1954, and was struck by the stunning fall color that persisted well into winter. The plant also has a good floral display over a more compact habit, typically reaching 4' tall in sunny or lightly shaded locations. Normally, plants from more southern provenances are marginally hardy in New Jersey, but this plant has proven to be surprisingly hardy, surviving temperatures of -15°F. Typical to the genus, the younger stems develop a deep red winter color on the sunny, southwestern side (**as seen at right**), while remaining green on the eastern sides. The red is from the pigment Anthocyanin, which serves to protect the stems from winter damage. The plant was distributed by the Arnold Arboretum in 1980 as an unnamed plant dividend, and it was not officially named until 1984 by Judy Zuk (1951-2007). At the time, Judy was the Director of the Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore College and admired a specimen of the plant at the Arboretum. Rightfully believing it to be worthy of cultivar status, she combined Mary's last name with Garnet, the official school color of Swarthmore, and voilà, the name was born! It received the Gold Medal Award from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in 1988, proving Judy's intuition was correct.



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Virginia Sweetspire looks wonderful in mass and its arching habit makes it a great plant for transitioning your eye from taller plants down to the ground plane or for planting along walkways. It makes a great companion for plants with red autumn fruits like Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata*), or pink flowers such as the plumes of Dallas Blues Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Dallas Blues'), or the autumn flowers of *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight', as seen in mid-October in the **image on the left**.



It makes a great companion for plants with red autumn fruits like Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata*), or pink flowers such as the plumes of Dallas Blues Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Dallas Blues'), or the autumn flowers of *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight', as seen in mid-October in the **image on the left**. And, it always provides a nice compliment for plants with good yellow fall color such as *Amsonia* or Flying Dragon Hardy Orange (*Poncirus trifoliata* 'Flying Dragon'). As you study the 'bones' of your garden this fall and winter, contemplate the many ways in which this plant might enhance your garden. It may be a 'late bloomer' to modern day gardeners, but with multiple seasons of interest, it is '*a handsome flowering shrub*' that is just yearning for more acceptance and use among gardeners!

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**Bruce Crawford, Manager of Horticulture, Morris County Park Commission**

## *Garden Club Yearbooks*

### *Something New Is Happening!*

*Did you submit your yearbook for an award? Over 40 garden clubs did just that.*

*The Awards Committee, consisting of ten GCNJ members, under the supervision of Chair, Beverly Reitinger, and Co-Chair, Barbara Duff, reviewed the 40 submitted yearbooks which this year included two digital yearbooks.*

*This was the first time digital yearbooks were received, and the committee members were quite impressed by what was submitted. One copy of each digital yearbook was printed out so that they could be judged appropriately. The two submitting clubs were the Wyckoff Garden Club, a larger club with about 130 members, and Town and Country Club of the Chathams, a small club with about 34 members. The two clubs were excited when they realized that their efforts could be evaluated for an award. This may be the way for future endeavors of other clubs.*

*We applaud the submitting clubs for their efforts and are in awe of what each club hopes to achieve throughout the year to come.*

*Beverly Reitinger  
Awards Chair  
[breit888@comcast.net](mailto:breit888@comcast.net)*

# Club Conversation

## Bridgewater Garden Club

The Bridgewater Garden Club (BGC) has extended its community outreach programming to the Martin Luther King Center (MLKYC) once a month for the last two years, to teach them a variety of educational activities designed to foster a love for nature and a deep appreciation of the environment.



All MLKYC students are eligible to participate in our free programs, developed by and paid for by the BGC.

In October, BGC taught the children about pollinators—birds, bees, butterflies, etc., to tie into the Garden Club of New Jersey's theme for the 2025-2027, "The Importance of Pollinators-Go Native."

The children, ages 5 to 13, painted and bejeweled pollinator decorations. Their decorations, along with added decorations from our garden club, will be displayed at the Festival of the Trees in Basking Ridge beginning on December 5, and will run through the end of the year.

Please join us at the Festival of the Trees and view all our decorations displayed on our six-foot tree. It speaks to a Pollinators Habitat and is entitled, "Wings and Wonder." For more information about our club and our programs, please write to [spinelligirls@aol.com](mailto:spinelligirls@aol.com).



Robin Shaw  
Publicity Chair for BCG  
[robinshaw@mindspring.com](mailto:robinshaw@mindspring.com)

## Clubs Celebrate Longevity!

### Garden Club of Montville

The 80th Anniversary of the Garden Club of Montville was held at the Black Rabbit Saloon in Montville on April 2, 2025. The luncheon took place from 11:30 AM to 3:00 P.M. Thirty-one of our members, five spouses plus two former members attended this anniversary party. In honor of this event, Mayor Kayne,



Committeeman Frank Cooney, and Deputy Mayor June Whitty also attended.

A representative from Tap into Montville, did an interview with Iris Kinkead, a member who has been in our club since 1975.

With spring plants for each table, and a program and history of our club for each attendee, the stage was set for a lovely buffet.

The club president greeted everyone, and Mayor Kayne gave a brief speech thanking the Garden Club for our community work and spoke about how things were 80 years ago. A cake with the club logo was served for dessert. It was really a festive event and a wonderful chance for everyone to be together to celebrate 80 years of existence.



Eleanor Weissenrieder  
Garden Club of Montville  
[eweissnj@aol.com](mailto:eweissnj@aol.com)

## *The Home Garden Club of Morristown*

In an age where patience is fleeting and conversations happen through screens; one tradition remains steadfast—The Home Garden Club of Morristown. Meeting in person for a century (with a brief Zoom era during Covid), this group has continued to cultivate not just gardens, but lifelong friendships. Though procedures have evolved, the club's dedication and camaraderie remain as strong as ever.

On April 16, 2025, members gathered for a festive centennial luncheon at Verona Restaurant in Randolph where Assemblywoman Aura K. Dunn presented the club with a commemorative certificate signed by the New Jersey State Legislature. Surrounded by vintage décor and cherished memorabilia, they celebrated a remarkable history rooted in passion and perseverance.



### **A Legacy Begins**

The club's roots trace back to 1925, amid the Roaring Twenties. A group of gardening enthusiasts, led by Mrs. William Hall and Mrs. William Dean, branched off from the Currant News Club of Morristown to form a new organization.

For 100 years, the club played a key role in preserving Morristown's landscapes, creating

gardens at Acorn Hall, the Schuyler-Hamilton House, and other cherished town landmarks. Since 1930, their beloved holiday wreath-making tradition has adorned historic locations like Washington's Headquarters, Fosterfields, Frelinghuysen Arboretum, and The Carol Simon Cancer Center, with handcrafted wreaths made from members' own greenery. The photo is from 2022.



### **A Lasting Impact**

Beyond beautification, the club has made civic contributions—most notable in 1927, when its efforts to combat New Jersey's mosquito problem helped establish the New Jersey Mosquito Control Association, still in existence today.

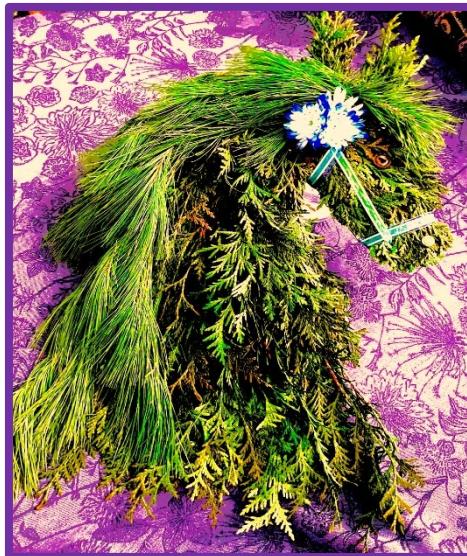
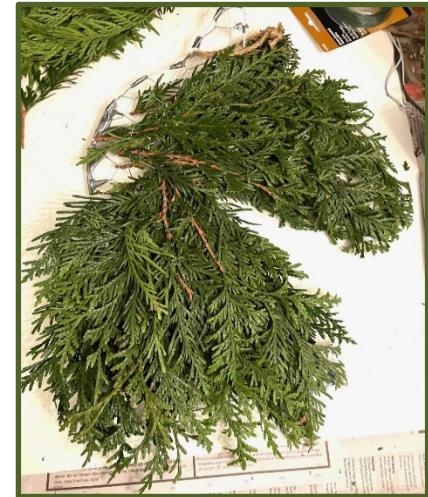
To honor its centennial legacy, a 100-Year Timeline Exhibit was displayed at the Morristown Library and Morris County Library throughout the month of April.

# Getting Crafty

*Karen Nash Memorial Butterfly Garden Garden Club*

## Making A Horse Wreath—Community Outreach “for a cause”

This HORSE WREATH was designed and previously donated by Diana Dove to Centenary University’s Therapeutic Riding TRAC Program. Another was donated as a Memorial Wreath.



Try making a different kind of wreath this year!

# Wreaths Across America

Wreaths Across America is a nonprofit organization founded to continue and expand the annual wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery begun by Maine businessman, Morrill Worcester, in 1992.

Join us in the mission to Remember, Honor, and Teach.

You can organize a ceremony in your community, sponsor a wreath, help others sponsor wreaths, and volunteer at any of our locations in the country, including Arlington National Cemetery.



**CLICK HERE** to go to the Wreaths Across America website to find all the information you need to sponsor and coordinate a wreath laying ceremony in your area.

Joan Cichalski

email: [jjcichalski@comcast.net](mailto:jjcichalski@comcast.net)

GCNJ Special Committee Chairperson-Wreaths Across America, (732) 977-4477.

## Meet Our New District 8 Director

### Michele Farias



I am honored to have been asked by the members of the Garden Club of New Jersey Board of Directors to serve as Director of our District .8.

Born and raised in Bound Brook , New Jersey , I graduated from Rider University with a BA in Education. I taught History and English at the Ridgeway School in Edgewater Park , NJ, where I met my husband , Vince , and settled into a 1900's farmhouse to raise our three children . We started Farias Surf & Sport the first year we were married-- a small family-owned beach rental and retail store on Long Beach Island that grew into seven stores.

Retired from our business , selling our farmhouse, and moving full time into our summer home in Long Beach Island, I wanted to become more active in our community and nourish my love of gardening---I joined the Garden Club of Long Beach Island.

Although our three grown children , eight grandchildren ( and one great grandchild on the way) keep me busy, I find the time I spend with the members of my garden club and all the activities and events associated with our club, give me a true sense of community, a commitment to helping others, and help me to express my creative side.

I am excited to continue to build upon Peggy Morrissey's great legacy as District 8 Director . I look forward to visiting all nineteen clubs within District 8 during my term as Director, and being a strong advocate for each one, growing the clubs so that we can be an important voice in our communities, and members can enjoy a very social, active, and informative club! May all our "gardens" grow beyond our expectations!

Michele Farias  
District 8 Director  
[michelefarias34@gmail.com](mailto:michelefarias34@gmail.com)

# Upcoming Events

**Jan. 13-15, 2026** Environmental School Course 1 (Virtual) from Ft. Meyers, FL Call Beverly Williams at 904-799-3556 or write to [bevthepatriot@gmail.com](mailto:bevthepatriot@gmail.com).

**Jan. 13-15, 2026** Landscape Design School Course 4 (Virtual) from Louisville, OH Call Bert Nero at 330-936-5894 or write to [bertnero@gmail.com](mailto:bertnero@gmail.com).

**Feb. 9-11, 2026** Gardening School Course 4 (Virtual) from New Smyrna Beach, FL Call Sally Flanagan at 386-428-3170 or write to [sfflan@aol.com](mailto:sfflan@aol.com).

**Mar. 16, 2026** Environmental School Course 3 (Virtual) from St. Louis, MO Call Jan Conant at 314-576-7590 or write to [djconant@msn.com](mailto:djconant@msn.com).

**Apr. 11-16, 2026** Flower Show School Course 4 from East Brunswick, NJ Write to Gail Bassolino at [cbassolino@aol.com](mailto:cbassolino@aol.com) or check GCNJ website for full information.

**April 18, 2026 11 A.M.** The Women Gardeners of Ridgewood will present an afternoon with Frances Palmer, celebrated author, ceramist, gardener, and photographer discussing her new book, "Life With Flowers". For more information, go to [www.womengardenersofridgewood.com](http://www.womengardenersofridgewood.com)

**April 22, 2026 11:30 A.M.-3:00 P.M.** Garden Club of Hunterdon Hills will host a luncheon at Stanton Ridge Country Club, 25 Club House Drive, Whitehouse Station, NJ with speaker, Mark Bryan of Mark Bryan Design, discussing Spring Floral Design. There will also be a Tricky Tray, Silent Auction. Cost is \$70 per person before March 1 and \$75 per person after March 1. Contact Norma McKean at 908-507-6714 or [njmck999@mac.com](mailto:njmck999@mac.com).

**May 4-6, 2026** National Convention in St. Louis, MO. All information will be available in the near future.

**June 3, 2026** Annual Meeting of the Garden Club of New Jersey at the Olde Mill Inn, Basking Ridge, NJ. Look for Information in the Spring Edition. of News Leaf or the GCNJ website.



Happy Winter  
Holidays!



Information  
for the next  
issue!

**February 1** is the deadline for articles and current club events  
for the **Spring, 2026, News Leaf Issue.**

Please send articles, pictures, and upcoming event information  
to Ruth Korn at [ruthkorn77@gmail.com](mailto:ruthkorn77@gmail.com)

Go to the GCNJ website at [www.gardenclubofnewjersey.org](http://www.gardenclubofnewjersey.org)  
for more information.