



Garden Club of New Jersey



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President's Message

Fall is a time of beautiful shades of red, orange, yellow, and brown, with mums and pumpkins, as we wind down and put our gardens to bed. However, it is also a time to take a look at your garden and see what didn't work. It's the perfect time to divide your perennials and adjust your garden design. Please remember to care for the pollinators in our garden. It's a great time to walk in an autumn meadow — make it simple and bring just your senses. Look at the vibrant golden and purple wildflowers, and the oranges of Monarch butterflies. Smell crisp air that says fall is here. Listen to the song of our state bird, the Goldfinch. Whatever your approach, make sure to take a stroll this fall.

Leave the leaves in your garden beds; they make an excellent mulch, and the bugs and soil will love you! Don't deadhead the spent flowers-- leave them for the birds. The birdhouses also need to be cleaned out, provide food this fall.

Review the catalogs and plan several activities: collect seeds from your plants, plant bulbs, and, of course, don't forget to start planting your winter vegetables, including greens such as lettuce, arugula, spinach, peas, and garlic bulbs. I love this time to review the catalogs and plan for my next year's daffodil and tulip display.

Let's shine a light on all our clubs. Many clubs return to gardening together in the fall, starting their year with creative workshops, outstanding speakers on various garden topics, and, of course, road trips to gardens or other fall activities. Please remember to share with other clubs any events that you think they would be interested in. We are better together.



Warmly,
Susan Berdahl
President, Garden Club of New Jersey

National Garden Club Annual Conference

May 2025

National Garden Club Annual Conference was held this year in the historic city of Charleston, South Carolina. Why go? Well, attending the conference provides opportunities for education, networking, and inspiration. Members can learn about what is going on around the country and participate in workshops while connecting with like-minded individuals.

This year the tours included a peek into the Grand Houses of Charleston, carriage tours of downtown, discovering the Gullah-- people who descended from slaves-- with walking and driving tours, and a trip to Magnolia Plantation & Garden. Some of the workshops were making sweet grass braiding baskets, a workshop on indigo dyeing, painting your own bee hotels, and many more.

Each year the awards are distributed to each state. The conference ended with the keynote speaker, Rebecca Wesson Darwin, the Co-founder of Garden and Gun and a native of Charleston. She shared her career in publishing from New York City to Charleston.

Our former State President, Beverly Kazickas, became the new CAR-SGC Director. and our State President, Sue Berdahl, got inducted as the 52nd GCNJ State President.

The conference ended with everyone learning how to line dance with the help of several dancers and a live band. It was a wonderful event.

Make sure you check out the National Garden Club website for details on the next Conference.

The website is www.gardenclub.org. and the 2026 Conference will be on May 04, 2026 to May 06, 2026 in St. Louis, Missouri. It's sure to be a wonderful event.

GETTING TO KNOW OUR NEW NATIONAL GARDEN CLUB PRESIDENT

Donna Donnelly, 2025-2027 NGC President



dmdonnelly@gardenclub.org

A native of Staten Island, New York, Donna and her family moved to a small pecan farm in Elleroy, South Carolina, in 2001. Many sacks of pecans were harvested during those first few years, and in her opinion, there is nothing like a fresh-picked buttery pecan! Donna is the mother of three grown sons and Mimi to seven grandchildren. She was a Registered Nurse for thirty-eight years, specializing and RNC Certified in Labor & Delivery and Perinatal Nursing.

For the first half of her adult life, she dedicated 23 years to volunteering at the Staten Island Historical Society. Shortly after relocating to the Southern Hemisphere, she joined the Elleroy Garden Club. Donna discovered that being part of a garden club was more than just about gardening; she found it gave her a complete sense of well-being and provided excellent programs. Over the years, Donna has taken advantage of educational opportunities offered by NGC and became an NGC Accredited Master Flower Show Judge, a Landscape Design Consultant, and a member of NFA and CFAA.

She has held several chair positions on the Board of Directors of The Garden Club of South Carolina (GCSC), including District Director and State President in 2017. Donna has served on the South Atlantic Region (SAR) Board of Directors since 2011. Since 2015, she has been part of the National Garden Club's Board of Directors and is currently the 49th NGC President for the 2025-2027 term.

Additionally, Donna is proud to be a certified South Carolina Wildlife Federation Pro-Birder and a Yellowstone National Park Junior Ranger.

These experiences have enriched her life, and she feels fortunate to have met many talented and knowledgeable individuals from across the United States, including International Affiliates. Where else can you experience such diverse cultural encounters along with all the educational benefits? National Garden Clubs is an incredible and rewarding organization. She is deeply committed to securing the future of NGC and preserving everything that is respected and admired about the organization.

AND NOW, MEET YOUR NEW GARDEN CLUB OF NEW JERSEY AWARDS CHAIR

I am excited to take on the role of Awards Chair for the Garden Club of New Jersey. It should be an exciting year with help from my mentor, Peggy Morrissey, and my co-helper from my club, Barbara Duff.

I have been a member of The Garden Club of Long Beach Island since 2006. Besides chairing numerous committees, I held the position of President for two years and was twice the chair of our Holiday House Tour. I was also instrumental in securing the Blue Star Memorial at our Historical Beach Haven Library. This past June, I was honored to receive the District VIII Perennial Bloom Award for 2025.



Being new as the Awards Chair, I look forward to working with everyone and appreciate any support you can give me along the way.

Beverly Reitinger
breitinger@comcast.net

Don't miss your chance to attend!

2025 CAR-SGC Annual Conference & Tri-Refresher

October 19-22, 2025

Maryland: "America in Miniature"

Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay

100 Heron Boulevard at Route 50

Cambridge, MD 21613

Register Early to Secure Your Spot

The Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland invite you to attend the 2025 CAR-SGC Conference in the heart of Maryland's Eastern Shore.

This year's theme, America in Miniature, celebrates Maryland's diverse landscapes and cultural heritage. From mountains to seashores, urban centers to rural farmlands, Maryland reflects the vastness of the country in one small state. [Check out these points of interest.](#) Our program will showcase top-notch speakers, innovative design, environmental stewardship, and the joy of gardening together. The program has been designed to also serve as a refresher for Garden Study, Landscape Design and Environmental Consultants.

Click on this link to register and see a full schedule of events and program topics. <https://www.car-sgc.org/2025-conference>

GCNJ Landscape Design School
Course 4 Series 18
Zoom Date Target is January 2026
(Will verify in next issue)

GET READY!

Required Readings from “*Stewards of the Land:*

A Survey of Landscape Architecture and Design in America”

Chapter 20: Redesign of Areas

Chapter 21: Contemporary Landscape Design

Chapter 26: Development of Landscape Architecture from World War II to Present

Chapter 31: Evaluating the Landscape Designs of Residential, Public, and Business Property

Chapter 33: Community Participation

Chapter 36 : Designs for the Future

History of Development of Community Gardens

Special Topic

Looking forward to a splendid sign up!

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Terry Blake

Landscape Design School Chair

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2025 NATIONAL CHILDREN & YOUTH GARDEN SYMPOSIUM



National Garden Clubs' sponsorship of the 2025 Youth Garden Symposium GREATLY APPRECIATED!



Bob Markey, NGC Youth Coordinator, joined **Courtney Alsua**, Director of National Programs for the American Horticulture Society, along with hundreds of educators from across the country, at the 33rd Annual National Children & Youth Garden Symposium held from July 8th through the 11th.

This year's theme was "Science and History in Youth Gardening," which included interactive learning sessions and workshops suitable for students from pre-K through 12th grade.

Field trips also took attendees to many of Hartford area's impressive college gardens to show how they teach their students about horticulture and how those students then teach local kids about plants.

"I was glad to represent NGC at this wonderful event and share information with attendees about NGC and its growing role in promoting youth gardening nationwide," noted Bob Markey.



The symposium was held at The Connecticut Science Center, a nine-story museum located on the Connecticut River in Hartford, Connecticut which features interactive child-oriented exhibits consisting of videos, audios, visuals, tactile components, programs, and live demonstrations.





Welcome CURRENT & FUTURE NGC YOUTH CLUB LEADERS!

COMING SOON!
OUR FIRST FULLY UPDATED NGC YOUTH CLUB HANDBOOK WILL SOON BE AVAILABLE IN BOTH DIGITAL & PRINTABLE FORMATS.

HOW to form an NGC Youth Club.

Our Mission

Plant America Grants

OUR NEW HANDBOOK IS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY—MAKING IT EASIER AND MORE ENJOYABLE THAN EVER TO FORM, FUND, AND LEAD YOUR OWN NGC-AFFILIATED YOUTH CLUB.

FUN TIPS!
Children's P & Activity Books

Nature Picture Books

These informative activity books are free!

Do something Green

EDUCATION WARRIOR

POLLUTION POWER

SUCCESSFUL TEEN YOUTH GARDEN PROJECT

Here are two examples of Teen Youth Projects that are highly beneficial to the public and their community. I served as the Youth Chair of the Karen Nash Memorial Butterfly Garden Club Youth Gardeners and was honored to volunteer as the Youth Project Advisor for these two youth-driven projects in Washington Borough and Washington Township, in Warren County.

★ In Washington Township, **Girl Scout Ambassador, Samantha Murzenski**, organized youth and adult volunteers with scouts who successfully built 314 feet of wooden bridges and boardwalk along previously impassable trail sections of the Pohatcong Creek Natural Area which is a Washington Twp. Public Park. She envisioned, planned, fundraised, and gathered youth and adult volunteers, plus engaging in an inspection by an engineer and other consultants, as she researched how to accomplish this project. **This was her Girl Scout Gold Award Project titled, “BRIDGES TO BETTER HEALTH.”** She produced an educational video and posted her progress on Instagram, documenting her project while explaining how the benefits of nature may improve mental health.

To engage youth and utilize the new boardwalk bridges, Samantha initiated a Mental Health and Youth Nature Club with a local teacher. She organized a well-attended ribbon cutting ceremony with a guided walking tour. This has brought attention to research that shows that spending time outdoors improves mental health. Samantha exceeded her requirements and was awarded an “Honorable Mention New Jersey Governor’s Teen Volunteer Award ”as well as being nominated for the Top National Garden Club High School Project Award. The Washington Twp. Town Council showed their appreciation by awarding her a proclamation.



Again, in Washington Township, **Sara Dicksen, a Girl Scout Ambassador**, developed a project called **“BEE EDUCATION AND PLANTING A BEE POLLINATOR PUBLIC GARDEN”**.

Sara researched, planned, budgeted , and secured pollinator plants for a public garden she planted at the Washington Borough 83 Fire House and Municipal Building located in the center of Washington Borough. With this experience, Sara presented Bee Education Programs for school groups, scouts, our KNMBG Garden Club and NABA, and for the general public. Sara completed her requirements and was presented with her **Girl Scout Gold Award**.



Diana Dove is the Youth Chair of the Karen Nash Memorial Butterfly Garden and for 2025-2027 will currently serve as the Garden Club of New Jersey Youth Consultant. She would like to visit interested Youth Garden Clubs who wish to share information about their Youth Projects. Contact Diana Dove at 908-763-9648 or write to Diana at dianadove13@gmail.com

Meet your GCNJ District Directors

District 1-Evelyn Pachner
District 2-Deborah Hirsch
District 3-Rose Wolverton
District 4-Denise Coleman

Liaison—First Vice President-Peggy Morrissey

District 5-Carolyn Seracka
District 6-Open
District 7-Trish Polunas
District 8-Michele Farias

Club Conversation

GRANDMA AND ME... LBI School creates flower arrangements with seniors

On Thursday, May 22, 12 members of the Garden Club of Long Beach Island met with the 4th grade and their grandparents for Intergenerational Day at the LBI Grade School in Ship Bottom.

Eighteen students and their guests made red, white, and blue floral arrangements to honor the federal holiday, Memorial Day. The flowers were red carnations, blue and white daisies, and baby's breath. The Garden Club brought mini-American flags to top off the arrangement, making them ready to take home.

The Intergenerational program was created by the Garden Club to give students and senior citizens a chance to interact while creating flower arrangements. All flowers and supplies are donated by the Club which is funded by the Holiday House Tour coming on December 12 and the Outdoor Living and the Art and Garden Tour, which was on June 19. The students welcomed the Garden Club with refreshments. Bev Reitinger, Chair of Intergenerational for the Garden Club said, "It was wonderful to see the interaction between the generations and the smiles as the arrangements were completed."



Scholarship Awards

The Garden Club of New Jersey offers various scholarships to eligible high school seniors, college undergraduate students and college graduate students. The eligibility requirements can be found on GCNJ's website under the title, "Scholarships."

This year (2025), 16 applications were received. After careful review, the Scholarship Committee awarded scholarships to 13 students and funded scholarships to two interns from Rutgers Garden.

These awards were presented to the students before the start of the GCNJ State Board's June 23rd meeting. Guests were invited and refreshments were served.

In addition, the Scholarship Committee selected two recipients that had received a GCNJ Scholarship, and submitted, on their behalf, a scholarship application to the National Garden Club and a scholarship application to the Central Atlantic Region. One applicant received a scholarship from the National Garden Club and the other was awarded a scholarship from Central Atlantic Region..

Look for news about GCNJ's 2026 Scholarship Program in a future News Leaf.

Kathleen Mullarkey
Scholarship Committee Chair
kmullarkey@verizon.net

Crawford's Corner

An Autumn Ironclad

As a gardener, I frequently look to nature for inspiration. Whether looking into a multicolored Hibiscus flower for noteworthy color combinations or studying plant communities in Shenandoah National Park of Virginia and Capitol Reef National Park of Utah, nature has much to teach us if we simply take the time to look! One attractive combination I often see along roadsides and fields of Northern NJ is the purple flowers of New York Ironweed combined with the pink blooms of Joe Pye Weed (**as seen at right**). New York Ironweed, botanically known as *Vernonia noveboracensis* may not be as well-known as Joe Pye, but it has long attracted my attention and is certainly a worthy garden addition!



Vernonia consists of nearly 350 species scattered throughout North and South America, Africa and Southeast Asia and is a member of the Asteraceae or Aster Family. New York Ironweed is native from Florida north to Massachusetts and west to Alabama, Tennessee and yes – New York! Although, some botanists wish to split the genus into several genera and reduce the number of species to near twenty, the genus was once even larger than today! New York Ironweed was initially named *Serratula noveboracensis* by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) in 1753. The genus name is from the Latin *Serra* for saw and refers to the strongly toothed or serrate leaf margins common to species of this genus. By contrast, *Vernonia* leaves (**as seen at right in June**) are more finely serrate and some species totally lack any serrations, displaying smooth or entire margins! The species epithet is derived from the Latin *Novum* or new and *Eboracum*, which was an ancient Roman fortress city in Britain that is presently the town of York – combined it means New York! Although *Vernonia* was teased out of the genus *Serratula* well over 200 years ago, *Serratula* remains a relatively large genus with approximately 30 species found in Europe and Asia.



The genus name of *Vernonia* was crafted in 1791 by Dr. Johann Christian Daniel von Schreber (1739-1810), who ironically was a student of Linnaeus and the Director of the Erlangen Botanical Garden in Germany. The genus name honors William Vernon (1666/7-1711), an English botanist and entomologist who traveled to Maryland in 1698 for a year-long expedition in search of exciting new plants, animals and even fossils! It is unclear whether Vernon collected seeds or specimens of this genus during his trip, although it is suspected he did. The rambling story of the plant's name finally comes to an end in 1803 when the French botanist André Michaux (1746-1802) properly and posthumously described this plant as *Vernonia noveboracensis* in his book *Flora Boreali-Americanana*. Michaux spent 11 years traveling throughout the US and Canada and had ample opportunity to see and study this species.



extended period of color for the late summer garden.

Vernonia noveboracensis is a tall plant, growing to 6' or greater in height by 3' wide. The stout stems are tipped with 3-10" wide clusters of composite flowers that are arranged as a slightly domed cyme. A cyme has a central stem ending in a flower bud with a whirl of subtending lateral branches each tipped with a flower **(as seen at left in late June)**. The central flower bud is always the first to open. Each individual composite flower has a diameter of $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ " **(as seen below)** and since they sequentially open from early August into late September, they provide an

One unique aspect of *Vernonia* is the flower morphology. Most members of the Asteraceae have a composite flower head (called a capitulum) consisting of a central boss of 30-50 fertile disc florets whose petals are fused and reduced to a small tube. These disc florets are typically brown, as seen in Black-eyed Susans. This central boss of disc florets is surrounded by an outer ring of sterile ray florets that produce a long colorful tongue-like extension called a ligule that grows to the outside of the flower. It is these ligules that appear like flower petals and aide in attracting pollinators. At a casual glance, composite flowers look just like a typical flower.

For *Vernonia*, this outer ring of ray florets is absent and the five petals forming the disc florets do not form a tube typical to composite flower. Rather, these florets grow far longer reaching upwards of $\frac{1}{2}$ " long. Disc florets of *Vernonia lettermannii* are pictured at right. These florets are an attractive magenta purple color and provide the floral color in lieu of the outer whirl of the tongue-like ray florets. Once the petals of each disc florets have reached their mature length, the tips recurve backwards, appearing much like a traditional flower in miniature and allowing the long style of the female pistil to emerge. The style is encircled by a picket-like arrangement of **5 white anthers** that lends a bit of a sparkle to the flower. For *Vernonia* and many members of the Aster family, the anthers release pollen before the stigma is receptive, a process called protandry that serves to prevent self-pollination and inbreeding. Following the release of pollen, the tip of the style splits into two recurved structures appearing much **like a two-prong fishing hook** with each 'hook' tipped by a mature, pollen receptive stigma. Once pollinated, the petals of the disc floret become flaccid, giving the flowers the appearance of fluffy purple buttons!





There is yet even more to reveal about this complex flower! Each capitulum or flower head is protected during the bud stage by a number of leafy bracts called phyllaries (singular is phyllary), appearing and functioning much like the calyx in a 'typical' flower. **The numerous phyllaries are readily seen in the closing image on page 18.** In addition, each individual disc floret also has a leafy outer calyx! Since the buds of the disc florets are protected by the phyllaries, a traditional protective calyx would provide little additional benefit and would be superfluous. To resolve this quandary of what to make of the 'unneeded' calyces, the calyx became modified into a structure called a pappus whose function is to aid in seed dispersal. For most members of the Aster Family, this pappus develops into a whirl of hairs. In other members it forms barbed awns and in others nothing develops at all! For plants such as Dandelions and *Vernonia*, the whirl of hairs creates a parachute-like structure, serving to move the seed via the wind while for plants like Tickseed (*Coreopsis spp.*) the barbed awns allow the seed to become attached to animal fur and clothing!

As the flowers of *Vernonia* fade following pollination, each disc floret forms a single gray seed attached to a rust-colored whirl of pappus hairs (**as seen on left above**). The common name of Ironweed most likely developed from the rusty color of the pappus and the color it lent to the overall flower cyme.

Vernonia noveboracensis is typically found in moist meadows, along the edge of ponds or in those aforementioned roadside ditches where plants receive full sun. They will gradually naturalize where the soils

remain moist although they can be easily grown in gardens with average moisture. The 4-6" long lance-shaped leaves are rough to the touch and are arranged alternately along the stems in a radial fashion. Their size provides a distinctly course and bold texture which is enhanced by the deep, dark green color. The plants look great combined with ornamental grasses, as suggested in the **image at right of a farm field in Northern NJ** where the plants are ignored by grazing cattle! The plants are equally as unpalatable to deer, a perk for many gardeners! The creatures that do find the plants



attractive are numerous pollinators, including butterflies, skippers, moths and native bees. When combined with the harmonizing pink flowers of Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), the attractive combination will only serve to invite more pollinators to your garden!

Of the roughly 350 remaining species, *Vernonia lettermannii* or the Narrowleaf Ironweed (**the foliage seen at left**) has recently become noticed as a plant with great ornamental merit. The species honors George Letterman (1841-1913), a graduate of what is now Penn State and a Civil War veteran. Following the war, he settled in Allenton Missouri, where he rented a modest one room log cabin and became known as a rather reclusive botanist who enjoyed studying the flora throughout the region surrounding Allenton. Despite being a recluse, he enjoyed people and taught grade school for 20+ years, following which he was unanimously elected to the position of school commissioner, for three terms!

He was also well regarded as a botanist, becoming friends with a local botanist named August Fendler (1813-1883), who in turn introduced him to Dr. George Engelmann (1809-1884), a German American botanist whose passion was studying plants of the Rocky Mountains. Letterman also hosted botanical notoriety to his cabin, such as Professor Charles Sprague Sargent, Professor of Arboriculture at Harvard and Director of the Arnold Arboretum. His log cabin contained numerous plant specimens that he readily shared with colleagues. He happily discussed where he found them, along with various plants growing in close proximity and any other personal observations. Although Letterman was offered positions at Yale and Harvard (twice actually at Harvard) as a professor of botany, he preferred the quiet and peaceful life of Allenton. Engelmann paid tribute to him in 1880 by naming this Arkansas and Oklahoma native in his honor.

Unlike its cousin, *Vernonia lettermannii* only grows to 36" tall by 24" wide. The plant bears numerous slender stems that, as the common name implies, are clothed in narrow lance-shaped leaves with entire or smooth margins, measuring a mere $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide by 4" long. The attractive, slender green foliage provides wonderful texture throughout the summer and fall. The tips of the stems branch into the traditional cymose flower heads bearing numerous $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter flowers from September into October (**as seen at right**). The flowers are a slightly brighter rose color when compared to New York Ironweed and the plants pair well with grasses or more densely and coarsely foliaged plants such as False Indigo (*Baptisia* sp.) and Compass Plant (*Silphium laciniatum*). This species is also far more adaptable, tolerating drier and more alkaline soil conditions, yet it is also tolerant of periodic inundation. Come autumn, it looks great



mixed with the narrow foliage of *Amsonia hubrichtii* which turns golden yellow while the *Vernonia* turns a much darker brown with a touch of purple. Once again, the pappus is orange in color (**as seen at right**). Introduced by Alan Armitage, the cultivar 'Iron Butterfly' is a thicker stemmed selection. It is touted as being resistant to flopping, although I have still seen plants splay open in fertile soils. It is not unusual for a few seedlings to appear but I would be hard pressed to call the plant weedy!



The Ironweeds may not be currently recognized by many gardeners for their numerous benefits, both to the garden and to our pollinators. Fortunately, I do feel their popularity is growing. We simply need to look more closely at our roadside and meadow 'weeds' and who knows what other 'rusty' ironclad and fun plant combinations we can find for our gardens!



Bruce Crawford
Manager of Horticulture
Morris County Park Commission

Upcoming Events

September 12 - September 13

Gardening School Course 2 – Sawyer, MI (In-Person Course)



September 16 - September 17

Flower Show School Symposium – Bethesda, MD

Horticulture: David Robson Topic: Coleus and Capitulum Allied Topic:

Subdividing Horticulture Design: Gina Jogan Topic: Floor Designs and

Luminary/Reflective Designs Allied Topic: Contrived Forms (Hands-On)

September 18 - September 19

Environmental School Course 4 – Derby, CT (Virtual Zoom Course)

September 18 - September 19

Gardening School Course 4 – Sawyer, MI (In-Person Course)

September 19 - September 21

Environmental School Course 4 – Mexia, TX (In-Person Course)

September 22 - September 23

Landscape Design School Course 4 – Lansing, MI

Go to www.gardenclub.org for full information.

October 1 - Garden Club of Spring Lake invites members to their Fall

Luncheon, “Local Summer” at 12 noon at Spring Lake Golf Club.

Fashion show by J. McLaughlin and a raffle and gift auction. Visit

www.gardenclubofspringlake.org for tickets and information.

December 12 – Long Beach Island Garden Club Holiday House Tour

More information soon.

Information for the next issue



November 1 is the deadline for articles and current club events
for the
Winter 2026 News Leaf Issue.

Please send articles and upcoming event information to

Ruth Korn at ruthkorn77@gmail.com

Go to the GCNJ website at
www.gardenclubofnewjersey.org
for more information.