

NJ GARDEN LEADERS

2023 AMERICAN COMMUNITY GARDENING
ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIPS

From Jersey Greens to Houston Scenes: Phyllis and Bonney Represent NJ at the National Community Garden Conference

by **Meghan Martin**

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This year, Duke Farms awarded scholarships to sponsor the participation of two New Jersey Community Garden Leaders at the American Community Gardening Conference in Houston, Texas. Prospective garden leaders submitted applications detailing key aspects of their respective gardens, including the number of plots and size of membership, the existence of educational programs, contributions to local food banks, and the implementation of composting initiatives.



Of particular significance, applicants described their motivations for attending the conference and explained the anticipated benefits for their gardens when they return home.



Cathy Walker, President of ACGA (left),
Janna Roberson, Executive Director of
Urban Harvest & Keynote Speaker (right)

NJ GARDEN LEADERS

BONNEY PARKER

Wrangle Brook Community Garden, Berkeley Township, NJ



What inspired the creation of your community garden?

The Wrangle Brook Community Garden began in 2013 as a social justice project of the Unitarian Universalist Ocean County Congregation. We were looking for a way to connect and serve our local community by allowing individuals and families to grow their own food, as well as to supply the local food pantries with fresh, organically grown vegetables. The Township of Berkeley agreed to lease us 4+ acres for \$1 a year. With their help we were able to install a 6'

fence around 1/2 acre of the property to keep out the deer. We raised funds and were helped by many businesses and individuals with in-kind donations of electrical work, a well for irrigation, lumber, tools, and many other essentials. Our membership grew from a handful of our congregants and many local residents to over 75 now. By 2015 we were producing enough vegetables to send almost 1,000 pounds to the food pantries that year. To date we have grown and harvested over 18,000 pounds of fresh vegetables, and herbs.



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What is your gardening experience?

In 2013, my venture into community gardening grew from a desire to create a stronger connection with my congregation (Unitarian Universalist in Ocean County) to the greater community. I had read about community gardening and saw a need that would serve residents who wanted to garden but were overwhelmed with the deer population and homeowner associations that restricted fences.

With my church's social justice committee, we were able to persuade the township to lease us, for a nominal fee, a parcel of land that had been a deserted recreation area, full of weeds and trash. Through the efforts of a tractor club, many volunteers, the township, and various businesses, we cleaned up the area, planted winter rye and built raised beds. One-half of the area is for individual beds, a sitting area and a pollinator garden. The other half is devoted to raising vegetables for the local food pantries. To date we have raised and delivered over 18,000 pounds of fresh, organically grown vegetables. My experience gardening has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Not only have I learned so much about plants and insects, watering, and harvesting, but I have been healed in body and soul.

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Wrangle Brook Community Garden, Berkeley Township, NJ



I have more energy than I had ten years ago, and I delight in the plants that grow because of (or in spite of!) my efforts. The garden was, and is, a place of solace for my spirit. Seven years ago, I experienced the sudden loss of a loved one. Spending time in the peace of the garden helped heal my grief.



Why did you want to attend the conference this year?

My intention when I applied for the scholarship to the 2023 ACGA Conference was to meet and learn from other garden organizers and managers about their experiences, how they solved problems, and how they sought out and encouraged diversity in their communities. I was pleased to learn that, while there are differences in what can be grown in various climates around the states, there are many similarities in how gardens and more importantly, the folks who garden, are managed.

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BONNEY PARKER

Wrangle Brook Community Garden, Berkeley Township, NJ



How will you use the knowledge that you gained at the Conference?

I intend to network with schools and other community groups to encourage participation in our garden as well as the development of other community gardens. From one workshop I learned about the value of having a youth coordinator who could organize young folks from a school or club to participate in the garden and bring them knowledge and skills through online programs as well as hands-on learning in the garden.

I learned about communicating in a more effective way about the mission of our garden so that we can attract various sources of funding and participation. Public relations are an important part of implementing our mission as we work to bring fresh vegetables to food-insecure places, and to encourage the growth of more community gardens. Having a community garden in places of scarcity not only can provide much needed food but it also creates a community, encouraging the “Art of Neighboring,” something I learned in another workshop.



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PHYLLIS LINDQUIST

Wagner Farms Arboretum and Gardens, Warren, NJ



What inspired the creation of your community garden?

Situated on rolling terrain in the Watchung Mountains, New Jersey, on land bordering the Passaic River, Wagner Farm Arboretum and Gardens are planned and planted to nurture trees, shrubs, flowers, vegetables, bees, butterflies and birds in an environment conducive to their growth. The property was originally owned by the Wagner family as a dairy farm with over 120 Holstein cows grazing the pastures. In 2001 Warren Township purchased the farmland

and now Wagner Farm Arboretum & Gardens operates as a Community Garden, that rents plots to those interested in growing fruits, vegetables and or flowers while adhering to organic practices. One of our Giving Gardens has donated over 100,000 pounds of fresh produce to the local food insecure communities since its inception and a Children's Garden for people of all ages to explore the natural world in a safe place. It is run entirely by volunteers except for a part-time administrator.



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PHYLLIS LINDQUIST

Wagner Farms Arboretum and Gardens, Warren, NJ



How did you become involved in your garden?

I adopted two plots in the Giving Garden, in addition to my own 10x20 garden plot, which I planted, weeded and harvested. All the produce is donated to the food insecure community, I joined the Community Garden Committee and became Editor of the Monthly Newsletter. I also became a member of the Giving Garden Committee to contribute my energy toward improving our production and assisted with all the necessary tasks of running a garden, including delivery of fresh produce to a variety of charities.

Eventually, I took on the leadership as the Garden Manager, selecting my committee and adding better methods of communications, orientation and automation. As Garden Manager I work with new gardeners to teach them the basics, such as the importance of proper soil, what to plant, when to plant, how to plant. In our monthly Newsletter, a segment is devoted to gardening instructions. I am always available to answer questions and assist gardeners. We work together to help and support each other. We improved the aesthetics of the Garden by adding flowerpots with flowers and a Welcome Garden with a friendly greeting, the Garden rules, herbs, and flowers.

Our Mission is to grow organic vegetables for our families and to support the Giving Garden in its quest to provide healthy, organic vegetables to the food insecure communities.

NJ GARDEN LEADERS

PHYLLIS LINDQUIST

Wagner Farms Arboretum and Gardens, Warren, NJ



How will you use the knowledge that you gained at the Conference?

I was introduced to a new method of irrigating the garden – that information will be presented to the committee to analyze and determine whether it could work in our garden.

The use of galvanized barrels and other pots for a more portable garden will also be introduced for implementation in a wet area of our gardens.

We will try to resource free materials for use in our gardens as suggested by members attending the workshops.

Use of seeds that have been recommended that produce a better and more prolific vegetables



NJ GARDEN LEADERS

THE NETWORK



The first informal gathering was held at Duke Farms, centrally located in Hillsborough, NJ. As New Jersey's largest community garden, Duke Farms served as a fitting venue for our collective growth and unity.

Introducing the New Jersey Community Garden Leaders Network

Founded in 2023, New Jersey Community Garden Leaders Network is an initiative designed to cultivate stronger bonds among garden leaders across the Garden State.

The mission of our network is to foster unity and strength among community garden leaders throughout New Jersey. We are committed to achieving this through the sharing of knowledge, best practices, resources, education, and opportunities for collaboration.

The New Jersey Community Garden Leaders Network envisions a future where community gardens across the state flourish through shared knowledge, collaboration, and unity. Join us in this exciting journey as we nurture both gardens and the communities they serve. Together, we'll transform New Jersey's garden landscape for the better.