



New England
Botanic Garden
AT TOWER HILL

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Honorees recognized by New England Botanic Garden are using plants to make a difference in the community

**Community Greening, Silver Medal, Cary Award, and more presented on
June 26 at the Worcester County Horticultural Society's 184th annual meeting**

BOYLSTON, MA, June 30, 2025 – [New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill](#), a nearly 200-acre garden owned and operated by the Worcester County Horticultural Society (WCHS), recently convened its members and the public for WCHS's 184th annual meeting. A highlight of the event included the [presentation of a slate of annual awards](#) honoring members of the community for contributions that advance the horticultural field and strengthen communities.

"It is a privilege to recognize individuals and groups from the community who share our mission of connecting people and plants," says Gayle Weiss, president of the WCHS Board of Trustees. "Each year, our annual awards spotlight impactful, sustainable garden projects, honor leaders who have shaped the field, and celebrate friends of the Garden whose service contributes to our Garden's growing success."

Honorary Massachusetts state citations were presented to the Garden's Community Greening Awardees. Selected from a pool of public nominations, Community Greening Awards honor individuals, municipalities, nonprofits, schools, businesses, or community groups whose gardening efforts bring people together or address a public need. Projects, which can take place across New England, must meet a variety of sustainability standards. [Community Greening Award nominations for 2026](#) are open through August 28, 2025. This year, five awardees were recognized:

- **Berlin Community Garden, Berlin, MA:** The Berlin Community Garden has been serving families in and around Berlin, MA, for 12 years. Plots are available free of charge to those in need, and produce is donated weekly to local food pantries, including BC4T, a pantry serving veterans. All gardeners commit to using organic techniques. Participants also come together for a seed and seedling swap at the beginning of the season.
- **Clark Street Community School Garden, Worcester, MA:** Worcester's Clark Street Community School Garden grew as a passion project for educator Charlene Preston, who, many years ago, began a regular Wednesday gardening club at the school. The gardening club expanded over the years, and students now tend five raised beds, a pumpkin patch, multiple fruit trees, and a native plant pollinator garden. They also maintain beautiful bulbs around the school. Through

gardening, students learn how to grow their own food, witness the power of gardens to transform spaces, and experience the joys of getting their hands dirty.

- **Gardening the Community, Springfield, MA:** Gardening the Community, a food justice organization founded 23 years ago in Springfield, MA, addresses hunger in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh produce and empowers youth as leaders in their communities. Youth learn and practice methods of sustainable urban agriculture by gardening in vacant lots in the city. Produce is sold at the organization's farm store where they accept SNAP and HIP. Through Gardening the Community, youth gain not only gardening skills, but also deeper knowledge of the ways institutionalized racism impacts food access and the power of community in driving social change.
- **Pine Hill Meadow Garden, Southborough, MA:** The Pine Hill Meadow Garden in Southborough, MA, was founded five years ago in response to the growing problem of food insecurity exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pine Hill Meadow Garden collaborates with Rachel's Table and other nonprofits and food pantries to distribute fresh, healthy food. They pride themselves on growing crops that are culturally relevant to the region's diverse communities. A sustainable solar panel water pump system used to water crops also ensures that the Pine Hill Meadow Garden is caring for people and planet. This entirely volunteer-run garden has provided more than 5 tons of produce to the community.
- **The Town of Oxford, Oxford, MA:** The Town of Oxford embeds environmental stewardship and sustainability into aspects of municipal work and community life. In 2024, the town's Pollinator Team led a multifaceted campaign to create pollinator habitat and build awareness about the benefits of native plants. They hosted community events and educational programs, planted pollinator gardens, promoted "low mow" pollinator meadows, and more. In addition to their pollinator-focused work, the town also constructs rain gardens on municipal properties, supports residents with a rain barrel program, and runs campaigns to educate the community about stormwater pollution.

In addition to Community Greening Awards, WCHS also made awards that honor lifetime achievement, excellence in horticulture, and service to the Garden.

- **Peter Del Tredici, The Cary Award:** Named in honor of Shrewsbury plantsman Ed Cary, this award recognizes educators, researchers, landscape professionals, or nursery professionals who have made significant contributions to the field of horticulture. Del Tredici led a storied thirty-five-year career at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. During his time at Arnold, he held numerous positions and made seed collecting and ecological research expeditions to China, Japan, and Korea. He has published over 100 scholarly articles and authored the book *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast: A Field Guide*. He is considered a world authority on the ecology and cultivation of the Ginkgo tree.
- **Rick Kimball, The Silver Medal:** One of the organization's highest honors, the Silver Medal recognizes commitment to WCHS over many years. Kimball has been involved with the organization since the botanic garden was first established at Tower Hill nearly forty years ago. He has contributed his time and talents to a variety of indispensable volunteer roles over the years and is valued by staff for his deep knowledge of horticulture.
- **Bill O'Toole, Distinguished Service Award:** This award recognizes individuals who have given more than 2,000 volunteer hours over 10 years of service to the Garden. Since 2010, O'Toole has dedicated 2,088 hours supporting the work of the horticulture team. From pruning in the Orchard to seasonal clean ups, seed planting, weeding, label sorting, special events preparation,

and more, O'Toole is someone the team can rely on to treat the Garden's living plant collections with care.

- **Laura Booth, *Annual Volunteer Award*:** Since becoming a volunteer in 2014, Booth has given 1,567 hours. While her contributions have been felt across the organization, the education team is especially grateful to count on her for support during school vacation week programs, Nature Play Days, and more. Her lighthearted and joyful presence makes families feel welcome and keeps them coming back.
- **Penney Gambino, *Annual Volunteer Award*:** Penney Gambino has worked to tend almost every garden space since she started as a volunteer in 2015. In addition to supporting the horticulture team, Penney has dedicated her 1,592 hours of service as a Garden Greeter, Explainer, and Garden Guide. She always has a cheerful disposition and is valued by the team for her readiness to take on any task, including acting as a mentor for newer volunteers.

This year, WCHS also recognized **Brian Vogt** as an **Honorary Trustee**. Presented posthumously, the honor celebrates visionary leader, Brian Vogt, CEO of Denver Botanic Gardens from 2007 to 2025. Vogt's leadership, knowledge, and enthusiasm helped pave the way for many public gardens, including New England Botanic Garden, to bravely and joyfully embrace IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) initiatives that welcome all people to public gardens.

"New England Botanic Garden is a garden for everyone. Our mission is to create experiences with plants that inspire people and improve the world, and recipients of our annual awards help make this possible," says Grace Elton, CEO of New England Botanic Garden. "We feel immense gratitude for the incredible work our awardees do and take pride in this opportunity to shine a light on their valuable contributions."

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Photo Caption: Community Greening Awardees from the Berlin Community Garden, Clark Street Community School Garden, Gardening the Community, Pine Hill Meadow Garden, and Town of Oxford

were honored at the 184th Annual Meeting of the Worcester County Horticultural Society. Representatives of all but Gardening the Community (located in Springfield, MA) are seen photographed with New England Botanic Garden CEO, Grace Elton. *New England Botanic Garden/Megan Stouffer*. **Additional Photos:** Find project images, group photo, and individual awardee photos [here](#). Captions included in the file names.

About New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill

New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill is a nonprofit organization located at 11 French Drive in Boylston, Massachusetts. A regional destination, the Garden is operated on nearly 200 acres by the Worcester County Horticultural Society, one of the oldest of its kind in the country, and is open to the public for garden viewing, trail walking, educational programs, private events, weddings, exhibitions, and more. In 2023, New England Botanic Garden was voted "Top Botanic Garden in the U.S." by *TravelAwaits*. New England Botanic Garden is an [AAM-accredited](#) museum that includes an irreplaceable collection of plants and creates opportunities for visitors to experience the wonder of plants, learn about the natural world, and make joyful connections. Learn all about New England Botanic Garden including its history, mission, and its staff at www.nebg.org.

Media Contact

Liz Nye, Public Relations Manager
New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill
508-869-6111 ext. 143 | lnye@nebg.org