



New England
Botanic Garden
AT TOWER HILL

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Local students recognized with debut New England Botanic Garden award at the Worcester Regional Science and Engineering Fair

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocation Technical High School Students are first to receive the Garden's Plant Science & Sustainability Award

BOYLSTON, MA, June 29, 2026 – [New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill](#) is pleased to announce the inaugural winners of its Plant Science and Sustainability Award, which debuted this year as part of the [Worcester Regional Science and Engineering Fair](#). The award recognizes projects by high school students that align with the Garden's mission of creating experiences with plants that inspire people and improve the world. Winning projects use plant science to address questions about ecosystems, agriculture, climate resilience, or sustainable use of land and resources.

Britha Abunga, Anna Platek, and Evan St. George of Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School earned the special recognition this year. Their project, *Cracking the Code: Enhancing Fruit Life by Identifying the Enemies of Freshness*, aims to provide solutions to global hunger by researching alternative methods for preserving fresh fruits and vegetables. Through experimentation, they explored how applications of a specific bacterium can help slow decomposition in combination with refrigeration.

"We offer our enthusiastic congratulations to the winners," says Marissa Gallant, Director of Education at New England Botanic Garden. "We were impressed by all of this year's entries and are inspired to see our region's students applying themselves to the sciences in ways that improve our collective world."

Projects were judged by New England Botanic Garden representatives who looked for how well students demonstrated a clear plant- or nature-based research question, applied sound methods, communicated their research, and made connections to real-world environmental or community needs.

Each student awardee received a one-year family membership to New England Botanic Garden and garden gear. They were celebrated at New England Botanic Garden on June 25 during the 185th annual meeting of the Worcester County Horticultural Society, owner and operator of the Garden. [A number of](#)

[other annual awards](#) were also made at this time honoring individuals and groups whose contributions advance the horticultural field and strengthen communities through plants and gardening.

To learn more about New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, visit nebg.org.



Plant Science and Sustainability Award recipients from Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School pictured with Worcester County Horticultural Society Board President Gayle Weiss and New England Botanic Garden CEO Grace Elton. From left: Gayle Weiss, Evan St. George, Anna Platek, and Grace Elton. Awardee Britha Abunga (not pictured) was also recognized. Photo by Troy B. Thompson Photography.

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About New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill

New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, [now celebrating its 40th anniversary](#), 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.

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