

SPECIAL 100TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION 1924-2024 —100 YEARS OF SERVING EARTH—

THE FLORIDA GARDENER

VOL. 62 No. 1 OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF FLORIDA FEDERATION OF GARDEN CLUBS, INC. | EST. 1953
SPRING 2024

YOUTH
GARDENERS
ARE THE
FUTURE

CELEBRATE **100** ANNIVERSARY IN JACKSONVILLE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOL. 62 NO. 1 SPRING 2024

PHOTO COVER CREDIT: SARA RUSSO OF HER DAUGHTER, AVEN. (SHE'S A TWIN!)

COVER STORY

- 41 *Youth Gardening*
by Lisa Packard, Editor

UP CLOSE WITH

- 28 *Carolyn Schaag*
by Lisa Packard, Editor

FFGC NEWS

- 5 *President's Message*
8 *Special Invitation*
21 *Deep South Unified Project*
by Daphna Goldberg
21 *What's Your Type?*
Ann Collins
24 *Members Matter*
by Christy Linke
25 *Four-Five Star Honors*
by Joanne Mulinare
26 *Affiliates*
by Donna Berger
31 *FFGC Matching Grants*
by Helen Purvis
36-37 *Camp Wekiva 50 Years*
by Mary Whisler
46 *FFGC Scholarship and
Endowment Fund*
by Helen Purvis
50 *Grand Celebration of
Florida Arbor Day*
by Lynn Artz

CONVENTION SECTION

- 14-15 *Convention Schedule*
Subject to Changes
16 *Bylaws*
17 *Anniversary Quilt*
18 *FAQ's*
19 *Convention Sponsors*

EDUCATION

- 12 *NGC School Schedules*
12 *FFGC Courses*

ARTICLES

- 46 *A Camellia By Any Other
Name*
by Gwen Carter
27 *Buy This Tag!*
by Lisa Packard
33 *Plant for Pollinators*
by Grace Tshanakas
34 *EEK! I Wish It Was Just a
Mouse*
by Inger Jones
38 *How to Certify Your
Garden as a Pollinator
Friendly Habitat*
by Jeri Decker
40 *Junior Garden Club and
Very Senior Citizens*
by Brenda Davis
48 *Wildflower Watercolors
on Tour*
by Sue Roberts
52 *Camraderie Among Garden
Club Members*
by Gwen Carter
52 *Tech Buddies*
by Lisa Packard
53 *What If You Threw a Fair
and 3,000 People
Came?*
by Jeri Glynn-Ronaldson

FEATURES

- 9 *Ramona Johnson poem*
20 *Voyager Cruise ad*
22 *Gainesville GC*
30 *Book Review*
32 *TFG page from 1953*
47 *Links & Grants*
49 *Advertise Here ad*
56-57 *Committees & Chairs*
58 *Letters to the Editor*
58 *1924 Prices & Trends*

CALENDAR

APR 9-12	Convention
APR 24	FFGC 100th B'day Brunch & Dinner at HQ see invitation pg 8
MAY 14-16	Flower Show Symposium Pensacola
MAY 21-24	NGC Flower Show Schools, Course 3, Manatee River GC
JUN 30	Membership Renewals END
JUN 2-5	NGC Convention Denver, CO
JUN 2-8	National Garden Week
JUN 12-14	SEEK 50th Ann'y
JUN-JUL	Wekiva Youth Camp 50th Ann'y
SEP 10-12	Fall BOD Meeting Winter Park HQ
NOV 24-27	NGC Flower Show School
—2025—	
JAN 6-11	Winter BOD Mtg Voyager of the Seas
APR 7-10	FFGC 98th Convention JAX

COVER STORY

Youth Gardening

by Lisa Packard, Editor
The Florida Gardener
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Since children will inherit the earth, it stands to reason that youth interest in gardening and environmental concerns and interest starts early. I had an opportunity to chat with two moms who started an incredible garden club at a local elementary school. Here's what they had to say:

Rebecca Gloddy and Carly Sinigoi are two mothers with kids attending Gemini Elementary School in Melbourne Beach. They had a vision to create space for a garden to introduce students to planting and growing their own vegetables and flowers. After meeting with then Gemini's Principal Mrs. Julian in 2018, they received the green light.

tfg

How and why was the club formed?

ggc

We started with garden consisting of two raised beds for the kindergartners. We used our own funding, time, and muscle to build and fill the bins. We were able to conduct projects once a week at recess time for the kindergarten classes which included both of our sons.

Our dedication was evident over time and Principal Julian allowed us to plan a larger garden on the north playground. We conducted plant sales to raise money and erected a working

tfg

What is the structure of the group? Who is in charge, who helps and how, and when/where do you meet?



garden for other grade levels to enjoy.

After many days, hours, and evenings of sweat and hard labor, along with key community helpers, the garden was constructed. Over the years, with different volunteers and donations, the garden evolved to what it is today.

ggc

A chicken named *Big Papa Puff* was dedicated as the President of the Garden Club until he was eaten by a raccoon, or some critter. The Gemini Garden Club is currently organized by ourselves, Sara Russo (whose daughter, Aven, graces our cover), and Sonya Ostensen. After the school reopened post-COVID, Sonya was given the responsibility of watering and ►

maintaining the kindergarten garden. She also organized special planting events for the kindergarten classes and helped with *Green Thumb Thursday* projects while learning more about gardening with the students. Last year she recruited volunteers by promoting the garden club through different emails, texts, and articles in *Geminews*, the school newsletter. Sonya started running the Green Thumb Thursdays for 1st through 5th grades when we were too busy.

This year, Rebecca and Sonya conduct Green Thumb Thursdays for 4th and 5th Grades. This takes place every Thursday during the students' recess times. The students may choose to join in the garden projects or to just enjoy recess. The kids

sometimes split the time or just want to sit in the garden area and relax. We try to focus their attention on the project at hand if they are interested.

The only rule for garden club is No Drama.

Sara Russo currently runs the First Grade Garden time for Green Thumb Fridays. She sets up projects such as planting the Butterfly Pea Vine seeds for a tea party made from the vine's purple flowers, pumpkin seed experiments, dried pressed flower crafts and more. Sara became involved with the Garden Club first as a parent volunteer and then as a social media promoter of the *Arts in the Garden* event in October. That event raised funds to support the garden and a memorial in the new music garden to

honor Gemini's beloved music teacher, Mr. Brian Meisenburg, who passed away. The event consisted of food truck vendors, a farmers' market, a student rock band for entertainment, high-end art sale, and featured a live mural painting by artist Chris Maslow on the garden wall! Sara had connections in the very talented local art scene. It was an incredible and fun community event.

tfg

How do the kids take responsibility for the activities?

ggc

The garden is very hands-on as the students control planting, watering, weeding, cutting back overgrown plants, and one of their favorites, harvesting and tasting the fruit and vegetables they have grown. The kids get excited to see their seeds grow into flowers and vegetables. For example, last year they grew cucumber and tomatoes from seed.

Upon harvesting, we cut up the cucumbers and let each student eat them. Some students had never tried a cucumber before and ended up loving them! The passion fruit was one of the most successful crops and very fun to sample as well!

We also have red worm composting that students help feed and maintain in bins with scraps from the garden. When the students wash the bins with water, it produces what is called *worm tea* which is a natural



green fertilizer that students pour on the crops or flowers growing.

Generally, if we give an interested student a specific job, they tend to take ownership and pride in the garden. However, there is one special volunteer who always seems to motivate



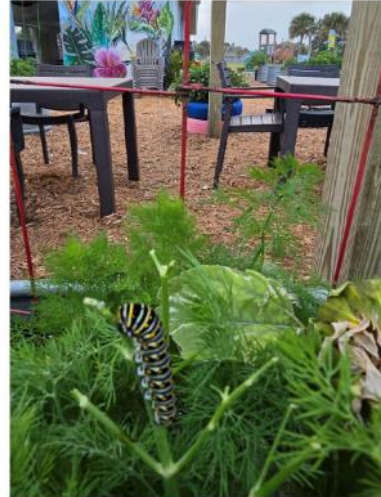
our students. She is the one and only Miss Vickie. Miss Vickie does not have any children or grandchildren enrolled in Gemini. She shows up almost every week to volunteer. Students gravitate to Miss Vickie as she fills them with positivity and garden wisdom. She is one of a kind! There is one unspoken rule, you don't tell Miss Vickie no!

tfg

How do you deal with the seasons and school schedule?

ggc

The garden operates during school hours. As registered Brevard School volunteers, we are allowed access to the garden outside of school hours and during weekends to conduct maintenance and water system checks, hurricane prep and



ggc

Last year we did a cabbage weigh-off where each class had their own bin and grew cabbages from seed. The largest cabbage was harvested, and each class collectively guessed the weight. The class who guessed closest to the actual weight won a pizza party served with homemade coleslaw from the cabbage harvest by garden club volunteers.

Occasionally fresh homemade lemonade is provided to students who participate in the garden. For example, this year we had the opportunity for 4th and 5th grade students to mulch the garden and the bicycle area. Using money from past fundraisers, six pallets of mulch were purchased. On two different dates we held a *Mulch Party* during Green Thumb Thursday. The students who helped to mulch were served fresh handmade lemonade and popcorn. It was amazing to see the teamwork these students pulled off with little guidance ►

cleanup, or prepare for special projects.

We try to start plantings during the appropriate growing season. Although, as extreme weather conditions are becoming more prevalent, hurricanes and Florida heat take a toll, it does not always work out.

tfg

Do you give out any awards at the end of the year?

from the area, some collected the empty mulch bags, and others spread and raked. The bicycle area was mulched in less than 40 minutes as students put down 4.5 pallets of mulch (338 bags)!



tfg

What's on your immediate wish list for the club? How can parents or non-school based businesses or volunteers help, given the school limitations? Do you get what you need or do you just buy what you need yourselves?

ggc

Mulch is always one of our main necessities. Most of the money from fundraisers is dedicated to purchasing mulch. Currently, we are trying to wrap up funding for picnic tables made from recycled materials to go under the donated gazebo in the north garden.

Our main wish is for consistent volunteers. We currently have a wonderful group of core volunteers for 1st, 4th, and 5th grades who make Green Thumb Thursday and Fridays possible. It would be amazing to have more committed volunteers for the school's other grade levels who are willing to get their hands dirty with the students. We did K-5th grades last year, with some parental participation. Yet there was no consistency which strained the few dedicated garden club volunteers.

The local community has been paramount in supporting the Gemini School Gardens both by volunteering and supporting our plant sale fundraisers. Every penny of funds raised are used to maintain Gemini's gardens and conduct garden projects.

tfg

What are some of your larger projects? Is there an opportunity for a full circle moment?

ggc

One of the largest projects conducted last year was the potato crop. Every student in the school was able to plant potato eyes. There were nine large towers standing four feet high, made from chicken wire, PVC piping, and drip hoses. It was Gemini's first attempt at growing a potato crop. We were planning to have a French Fry party for the students with a successful crop. Unfortunately, the crop failed, partly due to the heat, lack of watering, and

the method used. Despite the failed crop, the kids had a blast knocking over the towers and digging through the dirt in search of potatoes. However, it was a lesson that not all crops and plantings succeed despite our best efforts. This echoes in life when agriculture practices end up with failed crops causing food shortages, etc.

This school year we have started a new potato crop using a different method and, so far, the potatoes are thriving. As the students come to the garden and see the potato leaves sprouting up, we explain the new method of covering the leaves with fresh dirt and watering thoroughly and then allowing time for the leaves to grow further upward. This is another life lesson—that failures are merely opportunities to learn from and try again until you succeed. It looks like there may be a French Fry Party after all!

This is another life lesson—that failures are merely opportunities to learn from and try again until you succeed.

tfg

What do you think the kids enjoy most?

ggc

The students' interests seem to vary per age group. Younger grades (Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd) are little busy bees in the garden and love to plant and

water seedlings. Many of the 3rd and 4th graders enjoy harvesting and sampling the vegetables and fruits, as well as naming and playing with the worms in the compost bins. Overall, students simply love to dig in the dirt whether they are filling pots for seeds, covering potatoes, or clearing out bins.

tfg

What continuity have you seen from the kids who have been involved over a few years?

ggc

It is interesting to observe the students who were exposed to gardening from K-2nd grades as opposed to those who missed that early exposure with the COVID shutdown. **Kids exposed to gardening early on tend to be more active and excited about the garden.** Last year the 3rd grade class was a challenge. It took half a year of consistent Green Thumb Thursdays before they really started to show an interest as a group. However, by the end of the year, these kids were running out to greet us with big smiles on their garden days. We came to realize that this group was not exposed as early to gardening as school had shut down in the last part of their kindergarten year and the garden didn't get up and fully running again until the latter part of their 2nd grade year.

tfg

My last interview was the former White House florist hired by Obama. Does that make you feel special?

100TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION 1924-2024

ggc

Indeed! The Gemini Garden Club is grateful to be considered for this article. Thank you for allowing this opportunity to share our school garden adventures! We would also like to thank Principal Carver and Amy Lee, Head Custodian, who have been amazing with their support of the Garden Club's goals and efforts. 🌱



An article from *Spacecoast Living* with photographs not usable here. <https://spacecoastliving.com/a-growing-experience/>



▲Morgan (son of the Editor), now 35 and the King of *Nepenthes* in CA. He was a



"Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica.

Teach them the taste of sassafras and wintergreen. The lives of the blue sailors, mallow, sunbursts, the moccasin-flowers. And the frisky one—inkberry, lamb's-quarters, blueberries. And the aromatic ones—rosemary, oregano.

Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit.

Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms. Attention is the beginning of devotion."

- Mary Oliver

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-oliver>

summer camp leader at the Smithsonian Zoo (DC) because the competition was tough and the hiring person asked, "who wants to work in the bat cave." Only one person answered YES. We had "diggin' duds" and a "diggin' song." Yes, I raised a gardener.

—Editorial Privilege