



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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Our country will be celebrating 250 years throughout the state. So, the theme this year is to embrace red, white, and blue. As the bright yellow forsythia and cheerful daffodils fade, gardeners everywhere are preparing for the summer season ahead.

I have been attending Spring District Meetings and visiting clubs. It was wonderful to hear about all the activities taking place across New Jersey. From community projects to educational programs, our clubs are truly inspiring. I am proud to say that our clubs are amazing!

Across New Jersey, garden clubs are embracing the energy of spring and the promise of summer. Garden tours, plant fundraisers, and celebratory luncheons to welcome new officers, bring members together, and strengthen our communities.

It's an exciting time to cultivate not only beautiful gardens but also lasting friendships.

Sue Berdahl, GCNJ State President

Dig Into the New GCNJ Website!

Something exciting is growing at the Garden Club of New Jersey—our website! Since stepping into the role of Web Master, I have been working behind the scenes to refresh, reorganize, and redesign the GCNJ website to make it more useful, welcoming, and easier to navigate for everyone.

Like any thriving garden, a website needs regular care and attention. That means reviewing dropdown menus, updating outdated information, simplifying navigation, and making sure visitors can quickly find what they need. New online fillable forms are also being created to streamline processes and save time for members and club leaders alike.

Whether you are a first-time visitor, an experienced gardener, or a longtime GCNJ member, the website offers something for everyone. Public visitors can learn about the many benefits of joining a local garden club, discover who we are, and explore the mission of GCNJ. Members can access even more resources through the Members Only section.

Be sure to explore some of the valuable features already blooming online:

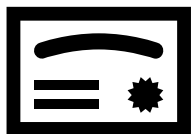
- **President's Welcome Message** – Stay connected with leadership updates and inspiration.
- **Calendar of Events** – Never miss an important meeting, flower show, or special program.
- **Publications** – Discover newsletters, educational resources, and helpful gardening advice.
- **Awards Information** – Learn about opportunities to recognize outstanding service and achievement.
- **Join a Club** – Find a local club and become part of our growing community.
- **Plant of the Month** – Enjoy seasonal highlights and planting inspiration.
- **Crawford's Corner** – Packed with gardening tools, ideas, and practical tips.

This redesign is about more than appearance, it is about creating a better experience and making our content more accessible, engaging, and valuable for all who visit.

And just like a successful garden project, collaboration makes everything better. If you notice an issue, have ideas for enhancements, or would like to suggest new content, your input is welcome. Together, we can continue to improve and perfect this important resource.

Take a fresh look this summer and see what's blooming online at the GCNJ website!

Cindy Bongiovanni
Secretary & Web Administrator
cindygcnjwebmaster@outlook.com



AWARDS



Perennial Bloom Award Reminder

A Perennial Bloom Award is given each year by the Garden Club of New Jersey. All applicants need to be submitted by **August 1** to be considered for the 2027 Award. The rules and application process for submission can be found on the Garden Club of New Jersey website under the heading, "AWARDS".

The Awards Committee was impressed by the number of clubs that participated this year by submitting applications for 60 plus awards. It was quite amazing to read about all the wonderful activities that each and every club completed. Please join us at the Annual Luncheon in Basking Ridge where awards and trophies will be presented.

Beverly Reitingier breit888@comcast.net
Barbara Duff duff@buzzinc.net
Awards Co-Chairs

Garden Club of New Jersey Membership Reminder

Thank you to all Garden Club Presidents and Treasurers who have submitted your club's annual membership dues for the Garden Club of New Jersey.

Membership in GCNJ helps support statewide programs, educational initiatives, environmental projects, scholarships, youth activities, and the many opportunities that connect clubs across New Jersey. Your continued participation strengthens our shared mission of promoting gardening, conservation, and civic beautification throughout the state.

This is a reminder for those clubs who have not yet submitted their club's annual membership dues.

Membership Dues Information

Annual dues are:

\$7.00 Membership Dues per individual member

\$2.00 Insurance Fee per individual member

Total: \$9.00 per individual member

Please submit one club check covering the total amount for all members.

Mailing Instructions

Please mail your club check along with your Member Roster, Registration Form, and New Member Form to:

Judy A. Bonanno
GCNJ Membership Chair
11 Samara Drive
Shrewsbury, NJ 07702

Insurance Information

Certificates of Insurance may be obtained by emailing **Arthur J. Gallagher & Co.** at

select_certificates@ajg.com. Additional insurance information can also be found on the Garden Club of New Jersey website under "MEMBERSHIP".

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important annual process. Your timely submission helps ensure uninterrupted membership benefits and allows GCNJ to continue serving clubs and communities across New Jersey. We appreciate your dedication and all that you do to help your local clubs grow and thrive.

Rutgers Gardens Update

It’s an exciting time at Rutgers Gardens! A newly completed **vision plan** promises to guide Rutgers Gardens in achieving a reinvigorated horticultural and educational vision as it connects with university and local communities. Existing gardens have been rejuvenated and new plantings abound. Visit the Otken Memorial Gardens to see the new oversized Adirondack chairs for the perfect photo op. The seasonal Friday Cook’s Market features produce grown by the Rutgers Gardens Student Farm among its many vendors.

As the garden club year winds down, perhaps your garden club might consider supporting a Rutgers Gardens summer intern. The 15-week program offers two tracks, Horticulture and Landscape Management, and Sustainable Agriculture. The internship provides each student with a hands-on, immersive outdoor learning and working experience.

The Gardens are also a great place to have a club meeting. Details for planning a visit may be found on the Rutgers Gardens website-- <https://rutgersgardens.rutgers.edu/visit> .

After all, Holly House at Rutgers Gardens is the Garden Club of New Jersey Headquarters!

Chris Endris

Rutgers Gardens Advisory Board Vice Chair

GCNJ Rutgers Gardens Liaison

chrisendris@gmail.com



Garden Club Chatter

Point Pleasant Garden Club

Read any good books, lately? The Point Pleasant Garden Club has! Last year it created a new club endeavor- a book club. on June 3rd, the PPGC Book Club will be celebrating its 1-year anniversary.

It started simply enough- with a book recommendation. A fellow gardener asked me if I had read “Braiding Sweetgrass,” by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Two chapters in, I couldn’t stop talking about it- my husband, neighbors, and even strangers at the grocery store politely listened while I enthusiastically told them how the Potawatomi language has a word for the energy of a mushroom bursting through the soil. (I quickly realized I needed to find some more like-minded book lovers to talk to.)

I found them at the next garden club meeting. When I casually asked the membership if there would be any interest- several hands shot up immediately -- so we got to work. Member and fellow bibliophile, Carol Giordano, was quick to recommend our first book, “The Pine Barrens,” by John McPhee. A love letter to New Jersey’s beloved Pinelands, it was the perfect beginning for a group of local gardeners who also loved to read and share what we’ve learned. The group gathers roughly once a month at Pollinator Point, the pollinator garden near the Boro town hall, in a cluster of permanent Adirondack chairs and beach chairs brought in for our book discussions.



We soon moved on to “Nature’s Best Hope,” by Doug Tallamy, and later enjoyed learning about Martin Sheldrake’s “Entangled Life” of fungi. Over the months we’ve been keen to seek out selections of both fiction and non-fiction, with the focus squarely centered on learning about nature, gardens, and protecting the environment. All this happens while we enjoy good conversation, our beautiful garden, and some fun refreshments along the way. Ever try pine soda or mushroom bacon? We have! And Karen Hillburg’s famous snickerdoodles are top notch.

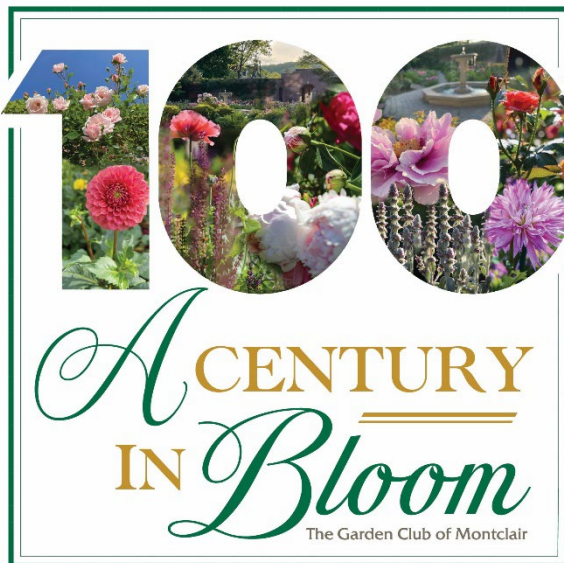
At our last meeting in May, we discussed Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring.”. If you would like to learn more, please contact Grace Hagemeyer at grace@hagemeyer.org or 732-773-7399.

Garden Club of Montclair Celebrates Its 100th Birthday

The Garden Club of Montclair held a festive celebration on April 27th marking the 100th birthday of the Club. The evening featured “100 Years in Bloom”, a film created for this anniversary year, showcasing the Club’s history and activity through interviews with members, archival film footage, and images of current pursuits. Club designers brought history to life through floral interpretations of each decade as in the picture to the right for the 2010’s.



The *Art in Bloom* exhibition at the Montclair Art Museum in mid-May included an “Artful Lunch” honoring the Garden Club of Montclair. Many Montclair Club members, and others from GCNJ, participated in this biennial design event of art, floral design, and community.



Celebrating with the community, floral design workshops, native plant talks, and tours of the Club’s *Avis Campbell Gardens* have been held throughout the year.

The Club will continue to mark its centennial this fall with a Standard Flower Show, “A Century in Bloom” to be held on Friday, September 25th through Sunday, September 27th at Van Vleck House & Gardens, 21 Van Vleck Street in Montclair, NJ. The show will include Horticulture, Design, Botanical Arts, Education,

and Youth Divisions. For information, visit the [website](#) or contact Sarah Stransky

sarahsstransky@gmail.com or Karen Fricke karenafricke@gmail.com.

Neshanic Garden Club Celebrates Its 97th Birthday & the 250th Anniversary of the United States with “Joyful Harvest” Standard Flower Show

The Neshanic Garden Club has been thriving since 1929. It continues long-standing community projects such as maintaining the Neshanic Station House Garden, the Sensory Garden at Ann Van Middlesworth Park and running the Greens Workshop for thirty years. It has led a Youth program to engage children at the public library and local YMCA for over twenty years and designing and maintaining the Gazebo and Blue Star Gardens at the Hillsborough Municipal Building. Over the years, the club members have also organized flower shows to educate members and residents about plants.

This year, the Neshanic Garden Club is presenting an NGC Standard Flower Show in honor of the 250th anniversary of our country. The theme of the show is “Joyful Harvest”, and it is open to the public on Friday and Saturday, September 11-12, 2026. Members of the club and public will be able to register to enter the show by contacting Diana Reinhardt at greinhardt9@gmail.com. With many new members, presenting a Standard Flower Show is a significant undertaking, but it is one that brings joy to the community.

In April, the Neshanic Youth Program built two raised beds at the YMCA for native plant gardening. The students who attend the monthly programs were interested in learning how to make raised beds and were excited to plant at their next meeting so they could watch them grow!

Bridgewater Garden Club

Working with Youth

Patti Cerrato, flower designer and member of the Bridgewater Garden Club (BGC) demonstrated and then raffled off her Easter design arrangements during our March program titled, "Hippity Hoppity Easter 's on its Way."



This is the third year that the Bridgewater Garden Club has engaged with the Martin Luther King (MLK) Youth Center to work with children ages 5-13 by offering monthly projects to cultivate a deep appreciation for gardening, nature, and the environment. The MLK projects are designed and executed by MLK Committee Chair, Pat Olivo, with the assistance of several other members. See below.



BGC Members left to right: Sharon Wilkinson, Pat Olivo and Karen Oldenburg.

January, February, and March MLK Projects are in the background of this picture.

Some of the other MLK projects were as follows:

Snowy Owl Pine Cones and Pom Pom Pine Cones: Children learned about varieties of pinecones and their various characteristics.

Bloom with Kindness: Using flowers and petals, MLK participants learned about the linkage between kindness and gardening and created a Valentine card with hearts.

Grass Head Buddy: Children were taught about a plant's life cycle by charting germinated grass seeds - using a growth chart.

Garden Club of Long Beach Island

NEW GARDEN CLUB GEAR CELEBRATES SPRING

Linking arms in their new leafy green and sky-blue hoodies and T-shirts, the Environmental Committee of The Garden Club of LBI met at the Surf City Library to plan their spring schedule. Sporting the club's motto, "Watch us Grow," the active wear is meant to spread the name of the club and highlight its community involvement.

Among The Garden Club's events this spring were the school children's program, "International Color Day" on March 27 at the Surf City Library; Senior citizens Flower Workshop on April 15; May Day Celebration with delivery of flowers on May 1; "Art in Bloom", a special event that matches artist's work with floral arrangements on May 21 at the Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts and Sciences, and, still to come-- the Outdoor Living Garden Tour and Art Show with five spectacular gardens on June 25. Further information is on the club's website, thegardencluboflbi.com.



Lining up Rockettes-style in the new t-shirts and hoodies are Garden Club Members, (left to right) Judy Bouton, Marge Selfridge, Environmental Chair Helen Comba, Marge Girardo, Gail McGrattan, Doris McKee, and Linda Kragie (on the right)

GARDEN CLUB BRINGS SPRING TO SENIORS IN MANAHAWKIN CENTER

On March 18, the Garden Club of LBI brought the joy of St. Patrick's Day and the coming of spring to 24 seniors at the Southern Ocean County Resource Center in Manahawkin. The Senior Services/Garden Therapy Committee of the Garden Club LBI brought baskets of flowers and containers as well as sparkly shamrocks to delight the center's visitors and staff.

Flowers for the day included ruffles of Bells of Ireland, huge white spider mums, green and white pom poms, green disbuds and pearly white baby's breath. Each arrangement was topped off with a ribbon-tied shamrock cluster, ready to go home with each participant.

The program is presented six times a year by the Garden Club LBI. Marge Girardo is chair for 2025-26.

LENDING A HAND. Rachel Halford, center, of The Garden Club's Senior Services Committee, helps seniors get the best effect at the recent flower workshop event sponsored by the club



Crawford's Corner

From Awkward Adolescents to Beautiful Adults!

Learn about Buckeyes!

Through no fault of their own, many wonderful plants simply lack 'sales appeal' when displayed in 5-Gal plastic pots at garden centers. For years I have tried to guide gardeners to great plants, only to watch them disregard it based on its juvenile appearance. To make matters worse, when these plants come into bloom later that spring or summer, many gardeners are no longer shopping for plants. One notorious example is our native Bottlebrush Buckeye, botanically known as *Aesculus parviflora* (**seen at right at Longwood Gardens in July**). Infamous for its somewhat leggy awkwardness when grown in a pot, it matures into a plant of great beauty!



Aesculus is a member of the Sapindaceae or Soapberry Family and features between 12-15 species ranging from shade trees to large shrubs. These species are native to temperate regions of North America, Asia, and Europe, with one species native to tropical SE Asia. Those native to the US are commonly named Buckeyes, since the Native Americans found the chestnut brown seeds with their basal tan circle similar in appearance to the eye of a male deer! Buckeyes contain high levels of a poisonous glycoside called saponin and were initially and mistakenly lumped into the genus *Castanea*, the edible Chestnuts. The Swedish Botanist and Physician Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) recognized the Buckeyes were innately different despite the nuts having a similar appearance and shifted these species to a new genus he named *Aesculus*. *Aesculus* was a Latin term used by the Romans for a tree that bore nuts, most likely an Oak. Owing to the high levels of saponins, *Aesculus* was also shifted to the Soapberry family while the true Chestnut remained in the Fagaceae or Beech Family.

Although there are several great species of Buckeye available for the garden, *Aesculus parviflora* is undoubtedly one of the best for late spring and summer interest. Native from South Carolina south to Florida and Alabama, *Aesculus parviflora* was described in 1788 by the American botanist and merchant Thomas Walter (1740-1789). A well-educated man, Walter initially settled in Charleston, South Carolina, and worked as a merchant before moving north to along the Santee River where he purchased a rice plantation. At some point he became interested in the local flora and started collecting seeds and plants within a 50-mile radius of his home, many of which were new to the cultivated world. In 1787 he completed a compilation of his descriptions entitled *Flora Caroliniana*, which was published in 1788. As an aside, Walter discovered around 200 new species, including another current gardening favorite – *Amsonia tabernaemontana* (Eastern Bluestar)! Bottlebrush Buckeye is a large plant, slowly growing to 12' tall and spreading to 15-20' wide via a suckering root system (**as seen on next page**). The stems are adorned with palmate leaves consisting of a whirl

of 5-7 leaflets, each 3-8” long by 1-2” wide. This medium green and nicely textured foliage provides a nice backdrop for the abundant, upright flower panicles that appear at a time when most shrubs have finished blooming – early summer.



From late June through July, the plants produce beautiful 12-16” long panicles of white flowers! Flower panicles consist of a long central stem from which much shorter stems radiate with each of these stems bearing from one to several flowers. For *Aesculus parviflora*, these stems are very short, giving the appearance that the flowers are actually attached to the central stem. Interestingly, the species name Walter crafted is from the Latin *Parvi* for small and *Flora* for flower, describing the relatively small individual flowers that measure 1” long by ½” diameter. However, with upwards of 280 flowers appearing along the 12-16” long panicles, the show is anything but small! Each trumpet shaped flower has four or five ½ inch long petals that on close inspection are highly ruffled or crinkled (**as pictured at left**). Emanating from the floral trumpet are 6-7 white filaments measuring 1-1½” long that are tipped by mahogany brown anthers. The single female style and stigma are only slightly shorter and blend into the array of filaments.

Overall, the effect is very lacy with panicles loosely resembling a bottlebrush used to clean test tubes, leading to its common name of Bottlebrush Buckeye!

If you wish to extend the floral display, consider the variety *serotina*. From the Latin *Serotinus* meaning late, it does indeed bloom later with flowers opening through late July and into August! Furthermore, Donald Rogers, a mycologist at the U. of Illinois grew seedlings of this variety at his home, of which one was selected by Joseph McDaniel, a colleague who named it “Rogers”. This form not only blooms well into August but, has robust panicles that reach upwards of 30” in length (**as seen at right**)! By late

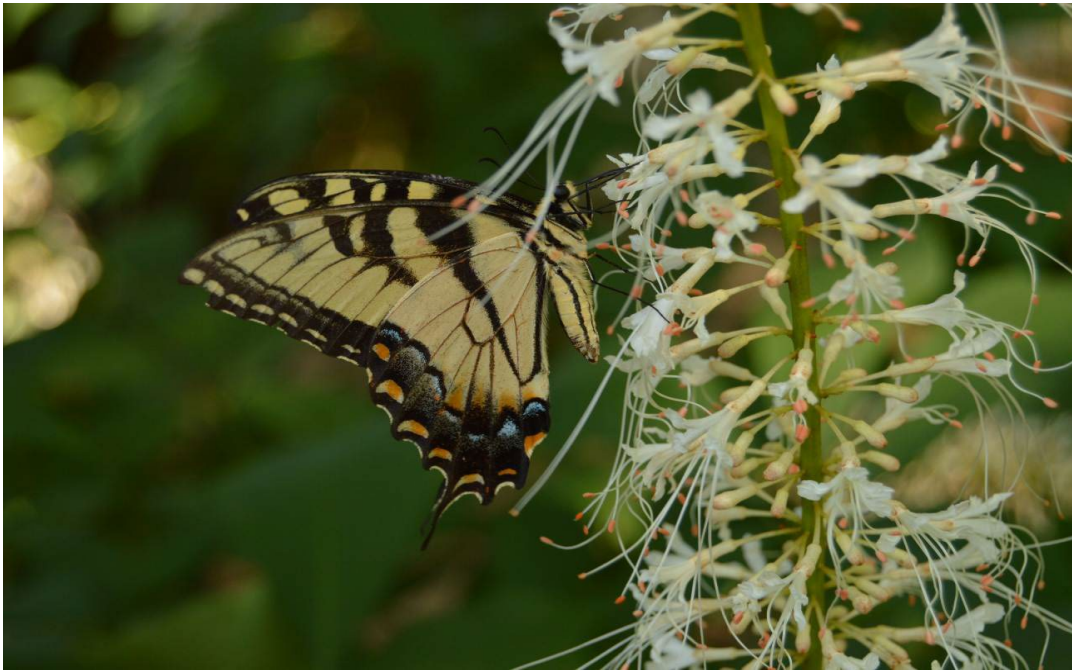


August, the central stem of the panicle bends downward under the weight of the fig-shaped nuts that are initially encased in a light tan husk. Come mid-September, the husks split open to reveal the mahogany brown nuts which will immediately start to germinate, if planted by October. Adding to the fall display is the fine yellow fall color that readily brightens a shady retreat (**as seen on next page**).

Bottlebrush Buckeye provides several useful solutions for the home landscape in both full sun and shade. They are ideal for screening unsightly views of neighboring properties, and their tolerance of road salt allows them to be planted near roads in snowy climates. They are great for creating the walls of outdoor garden rooms and owing to the saponins, they are resistant to deer browsing, making them ideal candidates for planting outside of deer fences. The candle-like flower shape also makes them great for pairing with spikey flowered perennials, such as Culvers Root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*) or Snakeroot (*Actea racemosa*). Thriving in rich humus with a pH of 6-7.5 and in zones from 4-8, it is not only beautiful but is tolerant of a diversity of conditions!



It is also important to note that not only are the flowers attractive to people, but also to numerous pollinators such as the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, as seen in the image below. Hopefully, more gardeners will understand that plants can be just like people, many of whom endure those awkward adolescent years. Fortunately – and just like people – these “adolescents” mature into “adults” of truly great beauty!



Bruce Crawford
Manager of Horticulture, Morris County Park Commission

Upcoming Events

June 3—The Home Garden Club of Morristown is sponsoring a bus trip to Andalusia Historic House, Gardens, and Arboretum in Andalusia, PA. It includes a guided tour of the ancestral home of the Biddle family and a self-guided tour of the Arboretum. Hours are 9:30am-5:30pm and tickets are \$95. Questions: Contact Barbara Lysenko at balysenko@aol.com

June 3—Garden Club of New Jersey Annual Meeting at the Olde Mill Inn in Basking Ridge, NJ—Awards, Scholarship Winners, Luncheon, Boutique, Shopping, and Speaker, Karen Fricke—"Natives: An Introduction"

June 6—15th Annual Keyport Garden Walk—10am-5pm. Garden talks at 9am and 1pm at Keyport Borough Hall, 70 W. Front St.

June 8—Women Gardeners of Ridgewood Secret Garden Tour: 10am-4pm Cost is \$55.

June 13-14—Society Hill Civic Association will sponsor a self-guided walking tour of 15+Urban Gardens in the Historic Neighborhood of Society Hill, Philadelphia, PA with volunteer hosts in each garden. Gardens of Society Hill Tour 2026 is on Saturday and Sunday, June 13-14-- 1-4pm, rain or shine. Tour Headquarters: Old Pine Community Center, 401 Lombard St, Philadelphia, where you purchase a ticket for \$35 in advance and \$40, day of tour for both days opening at 12:30pm. Ticket includes entry ticket, program and tour map, complimentary light refreshments, and access to restrooms at Old Pine Community Center. Questions—contact Linda Skale at 267-252-2729 or email LCSkale@gmail.com .

June 17—Seaweeders Garden Club of Bay Head & Mantoloking invites you to join their **biennial garden tour**, "A Wonderland of Gardens," which showcases 8 beautiful private gardens and concludes with a luncheon at Bay Head Yacht Club (111 Metcalf St., Bay Head) that reflects the whimsy of the Mad Hatters Tea Party. There will be two seatings with each guest receiving a Seaweeders Garden Club tote. A boutique will also offer a sophisticated range of garden friendly gift items. Cost for tour and luncheon is \$100. Purchase online at Seaweeders.org or by mail at PO Box 191, Bay Head 08742. Contact Karen Benziger at 914-217-6646 or KJM4659@gmail.com or call 914-217-6646 with questions.

June 24—Spring Lake Garden Club Seaside Garden Tour-For information and ticket sales, visit gardenclubofspringlake.com. The tour will be from 10am-3pm rain or shine. Tickets are \$45 or \$50, day of tour, at Spring Lake Community House, 300 Madison Avenue. Tickets may be purchased at Clayton Limousine, J McLaughlin, Coral Cove and Kate & Co or on the website via PayPal.

June 25—The Garden Club of Long Beach Island presents **2026 Outdoor Living & Garden Tour** from 10am-4pm. Tour includes 5 private home gardens, 2 public gardens, plein air artists and pop-up vendors. Cost is \$45. Questions-contact Janice Orlandi at 973-908-0604 or mrmrso@hotmail.com .

Fall Events

September 11-12—The Neshanic Garden Club, Inc. presents “Joyful Harvest”, a **Standard Flower Show** at Hillsborough Municipal Building, 379 South Branch Road, Hillsborough on Friday at 1pm-7pm and Saturday at 10am-2pm.

September 18-19—West Trenton Garden Club presents a **Standard Flower Show**, “Color Me Autumn” on Friday at 1pm-6pm and Saturday at 9am-3pm. It will be held at the Ewing Covenant Presbyterian Church-Fellowship Hall, 100 Scotch Road, Ewing.

September 25-26-27—Garden Club of Montclair presents a **Standard Flower Show** “A Century in Bloom” at the Van Vleck House & Gardens, 21 Van Vleck Street, Montclair, on Friday at 1pm-5pm, Saturday at 10am-5pm, and Sunday at 11am-3pm. It is free and handicapped access is available. Questions-contact Sarah Stransky at 973-865-3187 or sarahsstransky@gmail.com .

Fall Edition of News Leaf



Please send articles and upcoming event information to Ruth Korn at ruthkorn77@gmail.com before **August 1, 2026**.

Go to the GCNJ website at www.gardenclubofnewjersey.org for more information and now a fillable form for registering upcoming events. If pictures are also being forwarded to me, please be sure to have a picture release form completed for permission being given by those individuals in the photos. Also, send all pictures to me separately as jpgs, not embedded as part of a Word document. No PDFs please. The release form for pictures is on the website.