

The Garden Conservancy



Welcome to the National Premiere of
EARTH, I THANK YOU
The Garden and Legacy of Anne Spencer

Executive Producer
Kate Cordsen

Filmmakers
David and Michael Udris
Udris Film



2025 Accomplishments



The Garden Conservancy is deeply grateful for the support of our friends across the nation as we continue our mission to preserve, share, and celebrate America's gardens and diverse gardening traditions. We are pleased to share highlights from our education and preservation programs, which we strengthened and expanded in 2025 thanks to the generosity of our donors. On behalf of the Garden Conservancy's board of directors, we thank you for your commitment to our mission. We look forward to your continued involvement in our work.

Visitors to An Urban Refuge for Our Native Friends, an Open Days garden in Detroit, MI.

2025 by the Numbers



347
Open Days



32,419
Open Days
Tickets Sold



1,365
New
Members



7,115
Virtual
Program
Tickets
Sold



28
Organizations
Supported by
Our Grants



\$147,500
Awarded
in Grants

On the cover: The panel discussion following the national premiere of *Earth, I Thank You: The Garden and Legacy of Anne Spencer* at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

Open Days

Fueling America's passion for gardens, Garden Conservancy Open Days™ is the only nationwide garden visiting program. Thanks to our exceptional community of garden owners and volunteers, 2025 was a very successful season with more than 32,000 garden visits. We opened 347 gardens in 22 states and welcomed 120 new gardens to the program.



Visitors enjoy InSitu in Redding, CT. Photo: Leah Rae

Digging Deeper events—exclusive and site-specific programs that include informal talks, tours, and demonstrations with experts of every stripe—invite Open Days participants to take a closer look at our garden world. In 2025, we hosted 32 Digging Deeper events, one of our best years ever!

In 2025, Open Days celebrated its 30th anniversary. The program's success is a testament to the passion and generosity of gardeners. Since 1995, we have showcased nearly 5,000 gardens in some 40 states (as well as the District of Columbia and British Columbia) and welcomed some 1.5 million visitors! The generosity and enthusiasm of thousands of garden hosts, regional ambassadors, volunteers, nonprofit partners, and public garden partners have made this possible. They have helped create a vibrant community of people sharing ideas and expertise, learning from each other, and fostering a shared love of nature, art, design, and horticulture.

The Cabot Award

The Anne and Frank Cabot Award honors garden hosts and ambassadors who have been integral to the success of the Open Days program and those whose support has significantly enabled the Conservancy to expand its educational and preservation efforts.

Our 2025 honorees were presented with a beautifully calligraphed certificate designed by Marian McEvoy. Conferred with heartfelt thanks, this award recognizes the honorees' contributions to Open Days and to the field of American gardening.



The following were presented with the Anne and Frank Cabot Award in 2025:

Belinda and Stephen Kaye
Lithgow Cottage Farm, Millbrook, NY

Sue McKinley
Santa Barbara, CA

Ellen Petersen
Ellen Petersen, Stanfordville, NY

Shelby White
The White Garden, Lewisboro, NY

Silas Mountsier and Graeme Hardie
Mountsier/Hardie Garden, Nutley, NJ

Mike and Maureen Ruetters
Gardens at Clock Barn, Carlisle, MA

Virtual Programs

The Garden Conservancy's Virtual Programs provide dynamic opportunities for online learning and engagement, addressing the profound ecological, social, cultural, and economic changes shaping our world today. These programs explore how such shifts influence — and are influenced by — the world of gardens. Last year, more than 7,100 participants joined us online. Our 2025 Virtual Programs are outlined below.



Right: Sleepy Cat Farm, Greenwich, CT

2025 VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Sleepy Cat Farm, The Making of a Garden: Four-Part Virtual Program

Spring: How the Garden Evolved over Time
with Fred Landman, April 24

Summer: Pathways and Places
with Charles J. Stick, June 12

Fall: A Horticultural Perspective
with Alan Gorkin, October 2

Winter: Planning and Perfecting with the Future in Mind
with Kristi Wright, December 11

The Land is Full: Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects

with Thomas L. Woltz, Tuesday, April 1

Gertrude Jekyll's Munstead Wood: The Next 100 Years as a Place of Inspiration
with Katherine Mills and Pam Smith, April 10

Love Letter to a Garden
with Debbie Millman, May 8

Bedrock, The Making of a Public Garden
with Jill Nooney, May 22

Photographing for *Gardening with Nature* at the New York Botanical Garden
with Larry Lederman and Todd Forrest, June 26

The African Ancestors Garden: History and Memory at the International African American Museum
with Walter J. Hood, July 17

The Art of Fine Gardening
with Craig Bergmann and Russell Buvala, July 31

Back to the Land, a New Way of Life in the Country
with Pieter Estersohn, September 9

The Contemporary Garden
a virtual roundtable, October 7

The New Beautiful: Innovative Spaces and the Changing the Face of Gardens
with Stephanie Mahon, October 21

Garden to the Max: Joyful, Visionary, Maximalist Design
with Teresa Woodard, November 4

Life with Flowers: Inspiration and Lessons from the Garden
with Frances Palmer, November 18

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

The Garden Conservancy educational programs are made possible in part by the Coleman and Susan Burke Distinguished Lecture Fund; Courtnay and Terrence Daniels; the Lenhart Education Fund; and Susan and William McKinley. Additional support provided by Ritchie Battle, the Antonia Breck Fund, Camille Butrus, Michelle and Perry Griffith, Rise S. Johnson, the Krehbiel Family Foundation, Sleepy Cat Farm Foundation, and John S. Troy, FASLA.

Garden Masters

Garden Masters programs are connoisseur-level educational events at exclusive and significant landscapes.

They offer in-depth study opportunities that bring garden enthusiasts together with experts in horticulture and design. While meeting new friends, visitors are offered bespoke experiences to explore the philosophy of garden creation, design theory, and diverse gardening traditions.

2025 GARDEN MASTERS PROGRAMS

The Most Important Room of a House, The Garden with Norman Silk, Dale Morgan, and Richard Hass, June 15, The Turkel House, Detroit, MI

Pottery Tour at The Metropolitan Museum of Art with Frances Palmer, April 15, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

Olmsted's Moraine Farm with Cindy Brockway, Pilar Garro and Jeremy Dick, July 11, The Estate at Moraine Farm, Beverly, MA

Celebrating the American Colonial Spirit in House and Garden, August 17, Kelton House Farm, Fredonia, WI

Cider Making at Bird Haven Farm with Janet Mavec, September 20, Pottersville, NJ

Robin Hill, a Dan Pearson Garden in Connecticut, with James McGrath, October 9, Norfolk, CT

Un-Development at Metabolic Studios with Lauren Bon, Andrea Martinez, Kelly Majewski, October 21, Los Angeles, CA

Nancy Friese Becomes the Garden Conservancy's First Artist in Residence

Throughout 2025, acclaimed *plein air* painter Nancy Friese immersed herself in the landscapes of New York's Hudson Valley as the inaugural Artist in Residence for the Garden Conservancy. Her residency focused on documenting the shifting seasons at two landmark sites currently under restoration: Wethersfield Estate & Garden in Amenia and Blithewood Garden in Annandale-on-Hudson.

For hours at a time, the acclaimed painter and printmaker carefully observed the fleeting blooms, shifting light, and variety of vistas these extraordinary gardens offer. Painting with oil or watercolor, Friese translates her experiences to the canvas, adapting the work and embracing the constant change.

Friese is a faculty member at Rhode Island School of Design. She has a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University and has exhibited her work nationally and internationally. Among her honors and experiences, she received two National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artists Fellowships; a six-month Creative Artist Fellowship residency in Tokyo, and a six-month Lila Acheson Wallace Giverny Fellowship at Claude Monet's home in France. She was recently Artist in Residence at the Andy Warhol Preserve in Montauk, NY, administered by the Nature Conservancy.



To the Pond by Nancy Friese, Wethersfield Estate & Garden, Amenia, NY, 2025. Oil on canvas, 24 x 34 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Cade Tompkins Projects

Garden Futures Grants

In 2025, the Garden Conservancy awarded 27 Garden Futures Grants for small public gardens and nonprofit organizations making a significant impact on their communities through garden-based programming, and organizations that contribute to the study of preservation of garden history. A total of \$145,000 was granted to support their work and celebrate innovative and diverse gardening practices nationwide. These grants are for general operating support and typically range from \$2,500 to \$10,000. The Page Dickey Grant for American Gardens, an endowed grant of \$10,000, is awarded to a distinguished small public garden each year.

2025 GARDEN FUTURES GRANTS RECIPIENTS

Legacy Heritage, Montgomery, AL, recipient of the Page Dickey Grant for American Gardens

Albany County Historical Association | Ten Broeck Mansion, Albany, NY

Archives of American Gardens, Smithsonian, Washington, DC

Botanic Garden at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA

Buddha Dama Thuka Temple, Frankfort, NY

BuggyGirl Enterprises, Chicago, IL

Colonial Pennsylvania Farmstead, Gradyville, PA

Cylburn Arboretum Friends, Baltimore, MD

Denver Urban Gardens, Denver, CO

Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy Inc., Washington, DC

Elk Rock Garden Foundation, Portland, OR

Friends of Clermont, Germantown, NY

Friends of Mukai, Vashon, WA

Grow Lincoln County, Newport, OR

Growing Veterans, Lynden, WA

Homegrown National Park, Boston, MA

Kind Hearted Women's Society (Cante Waunsilipi Wi Ta Ominiciye), Rapid City, SD

Knoxville Botanical Garden, Knoxville, TN

La Huerta Roots & Rays, Chicago, IL

Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum, Lancaster, PA

Maine Foodscapes, Windham, ME

Mercy Garden of Peace and Healing, Chicago, IL

The Healthy Earth Organization, Estero, FL

Theodore Payne Foundation for Wild Flowers and Native Plants, Sun Valley, CA

Wave Hill, Bronx, NY

Wethersfield Foundation, Inc., Amenia, NY

Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy, Austin, TX

2025 GARDEN FUTURES GRANTS PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Palm Beach, FL



Kind Hearted Women's Society (Cante Waunsilipi Wi Ta Ominiciye), Rapid City, SD

National Speaking Tour

The Garden Conservancy's 2025 National Speaking Tour, featuring celebrated photographer Ngoc Minh Ngo and the release of Ngo's book, *Roses in the Garden: Stories of Treasured Collections* (Rizzoli, Spring 2025), took readers on a global journey through stunning rose gardens.

The tour launched at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, FL, on March 5. Ngo shared her personal story as a Vietnamese refugee, her passion for roses and photography, and her insights into breathtaking rose gardens from England and France to Japan and the United States. An illustrated conversation between Ngo and James Brayton Hall, Garden Conservancy President & CEO, explored the extraordinary diversity and beauty of the rose and the horticultural artistry it inspires. This event, part of the Daniels Family Garden Lecture, gave an inspiring start to the national tour.

Ngo continued to share her expertise and passion at five additional esteemed venues: the Ebell of Los Angeles in Los Angeles, CA, where she was joined by landscape architect and Garden Conservancy Board Member Joseph Marek, May 6; Filoli Historic House & Garden in Woodside, CA, May 7; the New York School of Interior Design in New York, NY, May 20; the Chicago Botanic Garden in Chicago, IL, June 16; and the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, MO, June 18.

The 2025 National Speaking Tour continued the Garden Conservancy's tradition of bringing influential figures in the gardening world to audiences nationwide, a program that has showcased the expertise of scholars, authors, and specialists since 2018.



Anne Spencer Documentary Film Premiere

The Garden Conservancy premiered *Earth, I Thank You: The Garden and Legacy of Anne Spencer* on May 4 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. The documentary explores the garden of the Harlem Renaissance poet, teacher, librarian, and civil rights advocate Anne Spencer, highlighting the cultural significance of the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum in Lynchburg, VA.

Michelle Commander, Smithsonian Museum's Deputy Director, and Robert Balentine, Garden Conservancy Chairman, welcomed attendees. Torey Carter-Conneen, CEO of the American Society of Landscape Architects, provided opening remarks.

Following the screening, Pamela Governale, the Garden Conservancy's Director of Preservation, introduced Dr. Carlyn Ferrari, author, Spencer scholar, and Assistant Professor of English at Seattle University, who moderated a panel discussion. Panelists included Brent Leggs, Executive Director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund and Senior Vice President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Dr. Evie Shockley, Zora Neale Hurston Distinguished Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing & Writers House, Rutgers University; Shaun Spencer-Hester, Executive Director of the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum; filmmakers David and Michael Udris of Udris Film; and James Brayton Hall, President and CEO of the Garden Conservancy.

Kate Cordsen, a Garden Conservancy board member, was the Executive Producer. The film was made possible by the **Suzanne and Frederic Rheinsein Fund for Documentary Films**.

Special Thanks to Our Lead Donors and Cultural Partners

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The Hillside Garden Club (in honor of Jane White)



Left: The crowd begins to gather in the auditorium before the documentary debut. Right: Garden Conservancy President & CEO James Brayton Hall and Shaun Spencer-Hester, Executive Director of the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum, participate in the post-premiere panel discussion.

Preservation Outreach

Using education as a cornerstone of our preservation efforts, we facilitate virtual preservation roundtables for members of the Garden Conservancy Northwest Network and organize in-person workshops, site visits, and panel discussions to deepen professional engagement and strengthen preservation capacity.

These programs provide a platform for peer exchange, resource-sharing, and discussion of timely issues such as climate adaptation, succession planning, and operational sustainability in public gardens.

We kicked off 2025 with a virtual Lunch & Learn following our fall workshop, “Elevating Tourism at Public Gardens.” In May, our spring workshop on “Climate Resilience in Public Gardens” at Lakewold Gardens led to a follow-up Lunch & Learn with Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI). Together we explored real-world strategies for helping public gardens adapt to climate change—from drought-tolerant plant selection and smarter irrigation to educational programs that inspire action.

In October, the Northwest Network met at Leach Botanical Garden in Portland, OR, for another workshop, “Best Practices for Volunteer & Docent Programs,” bringing together an enthusiastic and collaborative group for learning, garden tours, and networking.



GCNN members tour the W.W. Seymour Botanical Conservatory in Wright Park, Tacoma, WA.

2025 PROGRAMS

WINTER

Lunch & Learn: Elevating Tourism at Public Gardens (Virtual Program) with John Cooper and Jennifer Martinkus, Visit Yakima Tourism, Joleen Zanuzoski, GreenRubino, January 23

SPRING

Climate Resilience in Public Gardens at Lakewold Gardens with Nina Avila, Director of Education Programs, Hoyt Arboretum; Amelia Keyser-Gibson, PhD candidate, University of Washington; Lakewood, WA, May 15

Garden Tours: Private Garden and W.W. Seymour Botanical Conservatory, Tacoma, WA, May 16

FALL

Lunch & Learn: Climate Resilience in Public Gardens, Part 2 (Virtual Program) with Patricia Malcolm, Head of Membership and Conservation Services, Botanic Gardens Conservation International; Tessa Kum, Secretariat Administrator, Climate Change Alliance of Botanic Gardens and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria; Peter Symes, Climate Change Alliance of Botanic Gardens, September 24

Garden Tours: Leach Botanical Garden, Hoyt Arboretum, and Crystal Springs Rhododendron Garden, Portland, OR, November 5

Volunteer Programs as a Path to Preservation at Leach Botanical Garden, with Renee Meyers, Executive Director, Leach Botanical Garden; Marlee Eckman, Volunteer Program Manager, Johnson Creek Watershed Council; Cyrus Fachinni, Volunteer, Leach Botanical Garden, Portland, OR, November 6

Conservation Easements

The Garden Conservancy pioneered the use of conservation easements on gardens. Through the establishment of a conservation easement on a garden property, the Conservancy guarantees the perpetual protection of its cultural, historic, and horticultural significance. The Conservancy holds eight easements on historic and culturally significant American gardens around the country.

2025 Highlights:

- Successfully monitored eight conservation easements nationwide, ensuring compliance and continued preservation of valuable natural and cultural resources
- Conducted thorough reviews of management plans and baseline documentation reports for three conservation easements, safeguarding their preservation values for future generations
- Delivered tailored technical assistance to eight conservation easement gardens, aiding in the conservation of historic plant collections and other natural resources



Ruth Bancroft Garden, Walnut Creek, CA.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Chase Garden
Orting, WA

Eby Telegraph Hill
San Francisco, CA

The Elizabeth Lawrence House & Garden
Charlotte, NC

Gardens at Palmdale
Fremont, CA

Green Gables
Woodside, CA

The John Fairey Garden
Hempstead, TX

Keil Cove
Tiburon, CA

Ruth Bancroft Garden
Walnut Creek, CA

THE CONSERVANCY'S ARCHIVES: A Treasure Trove of Garden History

Since its founding in 1989, the Conservancy has diligently preserved the rich heritage of the gardens it has supported. Our archives house a diverse collection of materials that offer invaluable insights into the evolution of garden design, horticultural practices, and their cultural significance.

Within our archives, you'll find more than 300 digitized historic garden collections that encompass a wealth of materials, including written documents, photographs, audiovisual recordings, and ephemera, documenting the support and guidance provided by the Conservancy. In addition, we have a growing collection of historical documents. As of 2025, our archives contain some 240,000 documents, a testament to the organization's commitment to preserving garden history.

Through these archives, we are establishing a record that will increasingly support research, scholarship, and public engagement with the enduring legacy of gardens.

San Francisco Fall Show Benefit Luncheon

In October, the Garden Conservancy celebrated world-renowned garden designer, author, and lecturer Madison Cox at the San Francisco Fall Show. The benefit luncheon was held in the Marina District at the Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture.

Raised in California, Cox moved to Paris at 20 years old to study his craft, eventually becoming the first American to design a garden at the prestigious Chelsea Flower Show in 1997. His passion extends to lecturing globally and authoring numerous influential books on garden design, including *Private Gardens of Paris* and *Majorelle: A Moroccan Oasis*. Today, Cox presides over the internationally renowned Foundation Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech, cementing his legacy in the world of horticulture.

Guests enjoyed an exclusive lecture by Cox and received complimentary admission to explore the diverse exhibits of the Fall Show.

The event was a fundraising success, with proceeds supporting the **Suzanne and Frederic Rheinsein Fund for Documentary Films**. This vital fund works to broaden public understanding of gardens as essential cultural legacies through the medium of film. The Conservancy expressed deep gratitude to event co-chairs Shelley Belling, Elizabeth Everdell, and Kaye Heafey, as well as the dedicated benefit committee, for their roles in ensuring the luncheon's impact.



Kaye Heafey, Suzanne Tucker, Madison Cox, Elizabeth Everdell, and Shelley Belling.

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