

Bethesda Community Garden Club: 95 Years of Brightening Lives & Landscapes

Bethesda Community Garden Club (BCGC) was started as the Battery Park Garden Club in 1923 by 22 women who wanted to “do something about the treeless red clay fields.” According to Bethesda, A Social History, the group sought advice from Dr. David Lumsden of USDA, a member's husband. He suggested planting roses in the parking area between the streets and the sidewalk, initiating the club's work to beautify Bethesda.

Garden clubs have evolved since BCGC was founded 95 years ago, yet the club continues its long record of community service:

- Assisting with local school gardens and landscaping as early as 1942
- Landscaping and installing benches at the Montgomery Farm Women's Cooperative Market in 1970
- Helping plant and maintain Fern Valley at the National Arboretum
- Providing expertise, funding and labor for landscapes at Davis and Bethesda libraries.

Outreach today includes members tending the grounds of the those two libraries, donating funds to local public garden and projects and creating dozens of holiday arrangements to brighten community shelters.

BCGC also remains committed to educating gardeners, stimulating the love of gardening through sharing and practice. Supporting sound environmental practices, such as rain gardens, is a more recent emphasis. But as early as 1960, BCGC gave a scholarship for an elementary teacher to attend a summer program sponsored by Maryland's Conservation Education Council.

A few highlights from the past 95 years:

- BCGC became the first organization of record in 1942 to provide seasonal garden-fresh flowers every week to patients at Bethesda Naval Hospital.
- The benefit plant sale was initiated in May in 1943 to make extra money to finance community projects. Some plants were bought from a local nursery but most were dug by members from their gardens. Still the primary fundraiser, the sale occurs on the second Thursday in May at the Montgomery Farm Women's Cooperative Market.
- BCGC developed an interest in garden therapy in the 1950s and did projects for Christ Child Institute and Christ Church Child Center. An annual horticultural project continues for students with special needs at Ivymount School in Rockville.
- In 1962 members brought in evergreen clippings and Christmas decorations to design small arrangements for shut-ins. That effort evolved into the holiday greens workshop which now creates 185 holiday arrangements for shelters, soup kitchens and other organizations who help the less fortunate.

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- In 1964 the club's offer to sponsor the landscaping of Davis Library was accepted by Montgomery County. Club members also maintain the grounds at Bethesda Library.
- The club meets monthly, September through April, in addition to organizing periodic field trips to private and public gardens and other special events.