

Master Gardener Project Annual Report 2023



Name of Project: Downtown City Gardens

Name of Project Chair(s): Linda Schreiber

Number of Master Gardeners involved and project impact:

Located along the state's historic Highway 6, one of Iowa City's highest vehicular and pedestrian traffic areas, Downtown City Gardens provide an inviting, beautiful environment making a unique first impression for visitors to the University of Iowa and the world's third City of Literature that is part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Two gardens that provide a visual welcome to Iowa City are located in the heart of downtown at the city's heaviest-use parking garages on Burlington Street.

Multiple MG participated in establishing and maintaining the gardens during this growing season: Laura Bonifazi, Sadia Embree, Michael Hesseltine, Jean Holtzhammer, Kristin Ho, Roger Jensen, Carrie Parris, Melissa Serenda, Janlyn Slach, Byron Vanderberg, John Weeg, and Joel Wells.

Summary of project activities conducted throughout the year and results of the project: (include any data of successes of the project).

DCG volunteers completed converting the Capitol Street Parking Garage south garden (1,920 square feet) into native perennials. The project, a two-year transition totaling 445 plants, complements other downtown gardens featuring native perennials that help combat global climate change at a local level. The project achieved success with a partnership and help from Iowa City Park crews who watered the new plantings during the drought-plagued growing season. The project involved MG teamwork to remove daylilies in the south garden along Burlington Street making room for native perennials to be planted in 2023: Blackhawk Big Bluestem (*Andropogon*) (30 plants); Northwind Prairie Dogs *Panicum virgatum* (60 plants); Arkansas Blue Star (*Amsonia hubrichtii*), the Perennial Plant of the year 2011 (30 plants); and *Heliopsis helianthoides* (four flats/152 plugs). The new plants accent existing perennials: Ironweed *Vernonia fasciculata*, bellflower *Campanula rapunculoides*, Russian sage *Perovskia atriplicifolia*, a perfect plant for dry conditions. A self-seeding *calendula*, an annual marigold that has lined the sidewalk for several years, also accents the area.

The newly transformed CSPG garden filled in quickly and dramatically reduced weeding requirements allowing MG volunteers to assist other coordinators/projects and public spaces including:

- **Broadway Gardens.** Coordinated another *Team Up to Clean Up* activity for gardens in the South District to clean, prepare and plant gardens on April 23. Two dozen-plus plants—amsonia, bergamot, coreopsis, peonies, penstemon, and Russian sage—were added to the gardens. The gardens were maintained, weeded and watered weekly throughout the summer—thanks go to Table to Table for water access during the summer's near-drought conditions. In appreciation for the T2T partnership and to CommUnity food pantry located along the gardens, a weekly litter patrol was initiated.
- **Mercy Iowa City.** Responded to requests to assist with rose gardens along Market Street and in the memorial garden on the west side and the hosta garden on the north side of the hospital. MG spring visits trimmed the roses, weeded the gardens, and divided hostas. A late summer visit dealt with a rose slug infestation in the roses along Market Street.
- **Northside.** Maintained the Downtown City Gardens located in the Northside Market along Market and Linn streets (planted in 2013). The Karl Foerster grasses *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* (Plant of the Year 2001), added in 2020 via a grant from the Iowa City Downtown District, continue to thrive. Business owners in this location express their appreciation for MG's efforts to maintain the gardens.

- **Seed Share.** Revived the program with a generous seed packet donation from Lowe's establishing a new partnership. During the pandemic in 2022, the program was halted when proprietary seed companies reserved excess seeds exclusively for community gardens. Lowe's donations were picked up June 5, sorted and divided, and via a partnership with T2T deliveries were made within a week. Five area food pantries serving food-insecure persons in Johnson County and three area community seed libraries each received two distributions. A box of seed packets focusing on fall gardening was set aside for the T2T/Americore Free Produce Stands summer program that began in July. T2T/Americore staff visited four mobile home courts offering residents free garden produce and seeds from the Seed Share program. In late winter/early spring 2024, seed-starting programs will be coordinated with community seed libraries and community food pantries to provide materials and free seeds.
- **Dottie Ray Gardens.** Removed sunflowers from the Dottie Ray Gardens on Melrose Avenue near the Emerald Street Fire Station after firefighters expressed concern about traffic visibility and safety. To increase visibility the area will be replanted in the spring with plants that maintain reasonable height. Note: Sunflowers were not planted in this garden; birds and Mother Nature spread the seeds from the west garden to the east location.
- **UI Campus Police.** Continued care of the CSPG west garden at the entrance to the UI Campus Police (planted in 2021 with another ICDD grant).
- **Iowa Master Gardener Advisory Council.** Continued my service on the ISU MG Advisory Council, a three-year term 2022-2025.

Statement of what you would consider the greatest success of this project.

Downtown City Gardens are located along routes that reflect the highest pedestrian and vehicular traffic counts in Iowa City. The gardens continue to provide visitors with a pleasing visual environment. These innovative transformative changes using native perennials are helping adapt to a changing climate.

Throughout the 2023 garden season, outreach opportunities are emphasized to connect the DCG team to area partners and promote the MG organization. DCG volunteers participated in several creative learning exchanges that assist and strengthen relationships with other MG coordinators and local groups at public sites including:

- Coralville Firefighters Memorial—planting annuals and this year, perennials
- Johnson County Fairgrounds Gardens—ongoing maintenance
- Grow Johnson County—harvesting peppers
- Iowa City *Get Outside*—prairie seed collection
- Ecumenical Tower—garden redesign, hügelkultur build
- Sycamore Greenway Trail—trail maintenance, plant identification
- Whispering Meadows Wetland—improve water quality for wildlife with trash pickups and litter patrols
- Iowa City Landfill—toured the facility for information and increased understanding of products and services impacting the environment (postponed due to weather, rescheduling)
- Prairie Burn—request(s) sent (pending)

What needs are there to help this project continue? What changes would you like to make for the future?

Funding connects MG to opportunities and groups and assists with planning, planting, and revitalizing gardening opportunities in other/more areas. Continue adding native perennials to gardens to complement the perennial movement design—long roots of native perennials store carbon underground helping reduce emissions to combat climate change.

Partners share images of Seed Share programs



Coralville Food Pantry



Coralville Food
Pantry



North Liberty Seed Library