



## Growing Green Thumbs

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For the fifth year, the Bird Homestead is welcoming young students after school from the Port Chester Carver Center for a hands-on program in organic gardening. For nine weeks the children are learning to plant, tend, and harvest their vegetables without the use of any chemicals.

Taught by Han-Yu Hung, Children's Gardening Program Coordinator at the New York Botanical Garden and Anne Mottola, an instructor at NYBG, the program emphasizes gardening without pesticides to keep our food and our environment healthy. Henry Bird (1869-1959), a prominent entomologist, was an early proponent of avoiding pesticides in vegetable gardening and a pioneer in advocating the use of beneficial insects to protect crops.

The program provides an introduction to botany and beneficial insects and is designed to teach an understanding of healthy food and where it comes from. Edible gardening was fundamental to the Bird family's lifestyle. They maintained extensive vegetable gardens, grape arbors, and fruit trees on the Bird Homestead property.



The children spent their first class of the season digging compost into raised beds and planting tiny radish seeds. Hung and Mottola are introducing the children to basic composting and soil science, explaining how microbes and earthworms help break down organic materials and enrich soil fertility.

This year the children are adding a native milkweed area to the garden to help Monarch butterflies. As widely reported, these beautiful butterflies are declining at an alarming rate, in part, due to loss of habitat from over development. One of the major threats to the species is the lack of available milkweed, the only host food plant for Monarch caterpillars.

The program for the Carver Center students is offered free of charge and supported by the Anvilla P. Cunningham Fund for Gardening Education at the Bird Homestead. The fund honors the memory of Mrs. Cunningham, an accomplished gardener and botanist, whose flower, vegetable, and herb gardens at her home in Rye were widely admired.

"It is a joy to have the Carver Center students dig in and learn here at the Bird Homestead garden," said Anne Stillman, president of the Bird Homestead. "We thank all the donors to the Anvilla P. Cunningham Fund for making it possible."

Photos courtesy of Anne Mottola