

Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden

2025 HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

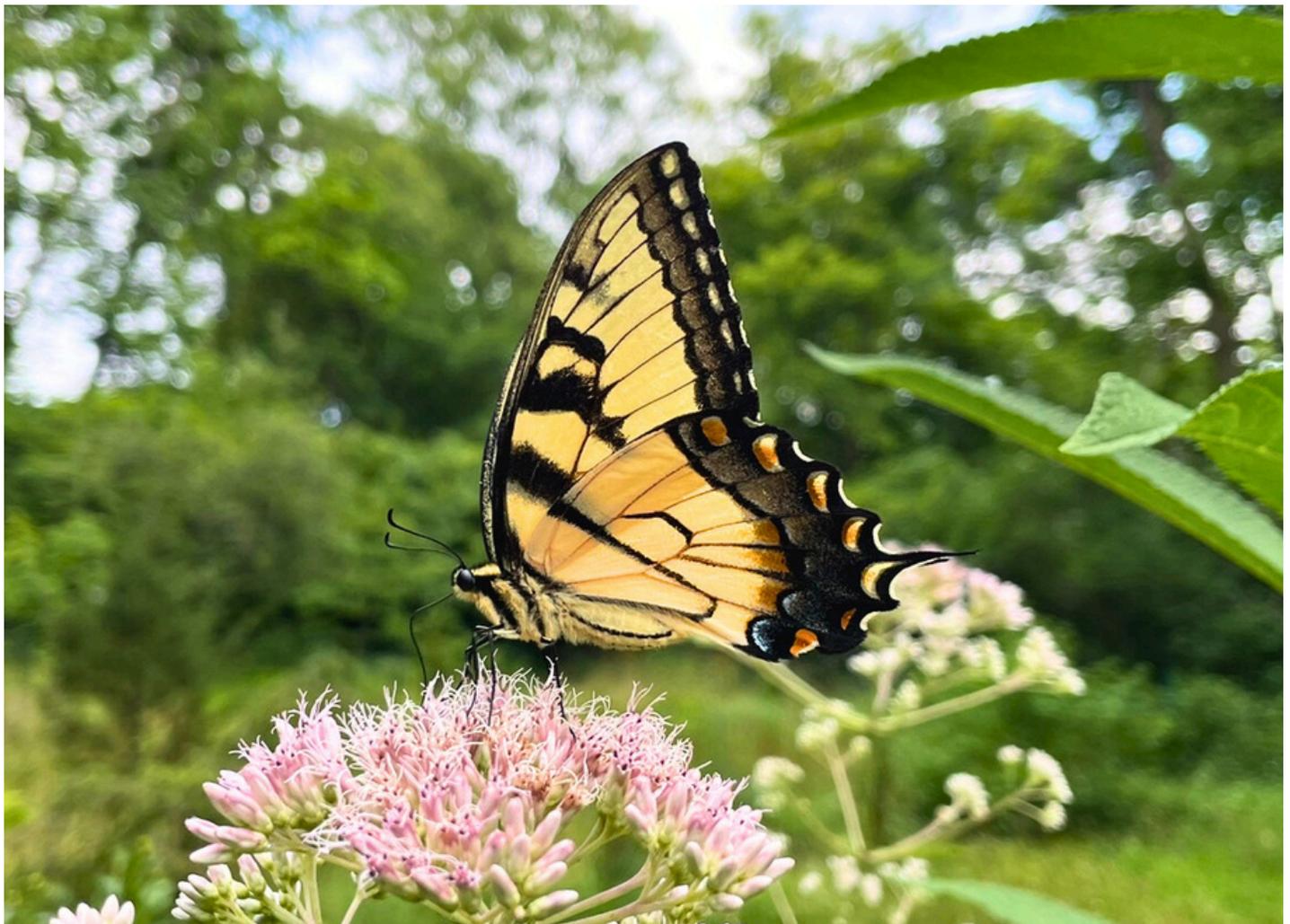


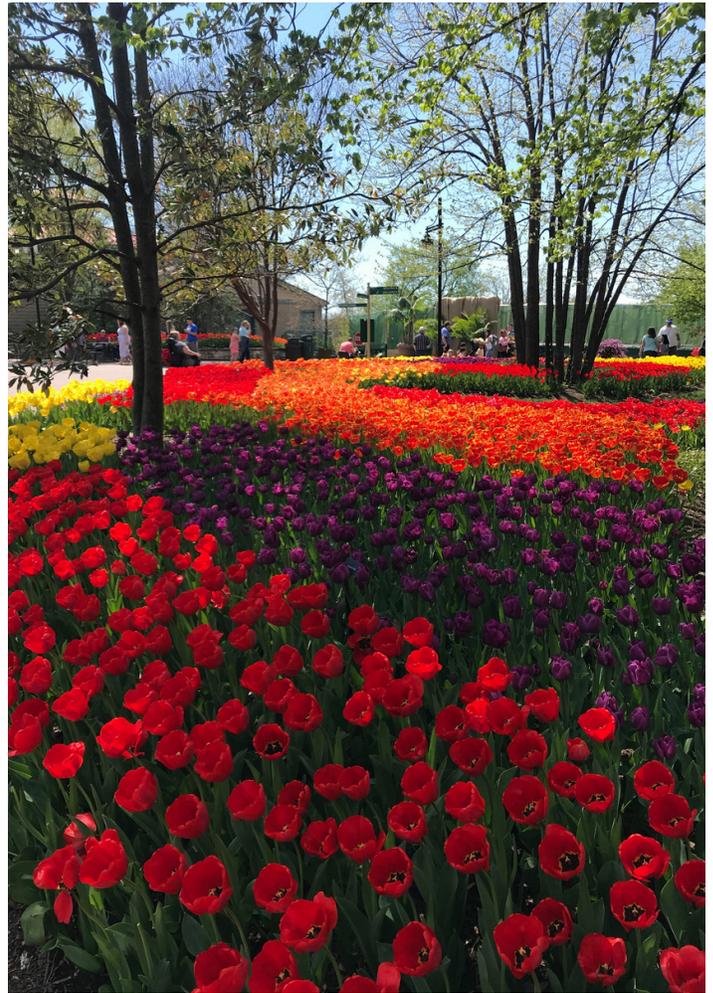
BY THE NUMBERS

Plants Planted: 188,661

- Tulips: 120,000
- Annuals: 60,000
- Community Spaces: 4,376
- Zoo Landscapes: 4,285

Plants sold to local gardeners: 13,775





@THE ZOO



ANNUAL PLANT TRIALS PROGRAM

The program that brings vibrant color to the entrance and main pathways of the zoo has **DOUBLED** in volume over the last 3 years and is recognized as one of the top annual trial programs in the country.

The Breeder's Showcase, in its 3rd year, saw 230 plant professionals from across the world tour the gardens this summer and observe their donated plants in a naturalistic landscape setting.

Trialing of this magnitude is a year-round process that involves ordering, growing, planting, maintaining, tracking and reporting.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 60,000 total plants installed
- 887 varieties
- 31 providers donating material



TULIP DISPLAYS



For six weeks in mid-fall, our entire crew, with the assistance of 15 corporate volunteer groups, oversaw the planting and netting of 120,000 tulip bulbs. Come April, this will produce the largest floral display of tulips in the Midwest.



SIAMANG POINT



The completion of Elephant Trek's final phase was the major departmental priority this spring, which included the installation of three new habitats (Siamang gibbon, Asian small-clawed sea otter and hornbill) and over 10,000 square feet of new ornamental landscapes.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 115 large trees
- 287 shrubs
- 1,116 perennials/grasses/vines
- 400 cubic yards of fresh soil
- A custom-built retaining wall using 60 tons of boulder



ELEPHANT TREK



The continued installation and maintenance of 4 new acres of zoo landscape, including the Asian Waterfall Garden, was essential to keeping the visitor experience elevated in Elephant Trek year two.



Lisa Hubbard

BEAR RIDGE



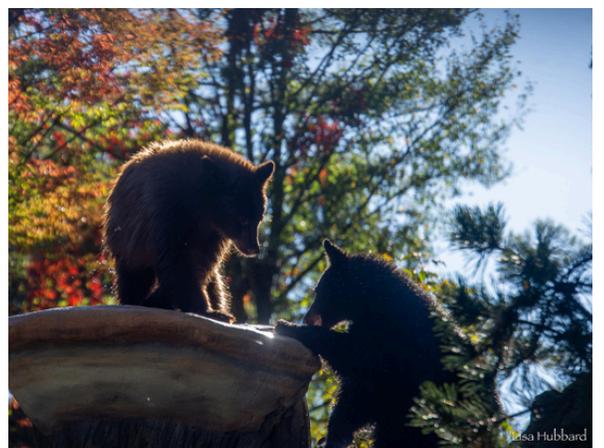
Horticulture work came fast and furious at Bear Ridge this summer. Three major botanical zones were shaped and installed: the upper viewing Adventure Trail, the black bear habitat itself, and the lower viewing exit ramp through Otter Coast.

The plant palette of Bear Ridge pays homage to the Appalachian mixed mesophytic forest ecoregion and the cove forests tucked throughout. Represented in southeastern Ohio, these forests are the most biodiverse areas in the state. Working off the old infrastructure of the Zoo's "Bear Hill", which conveniently portrays the limestone rock face of a gorge, we were able to bring the area to life.

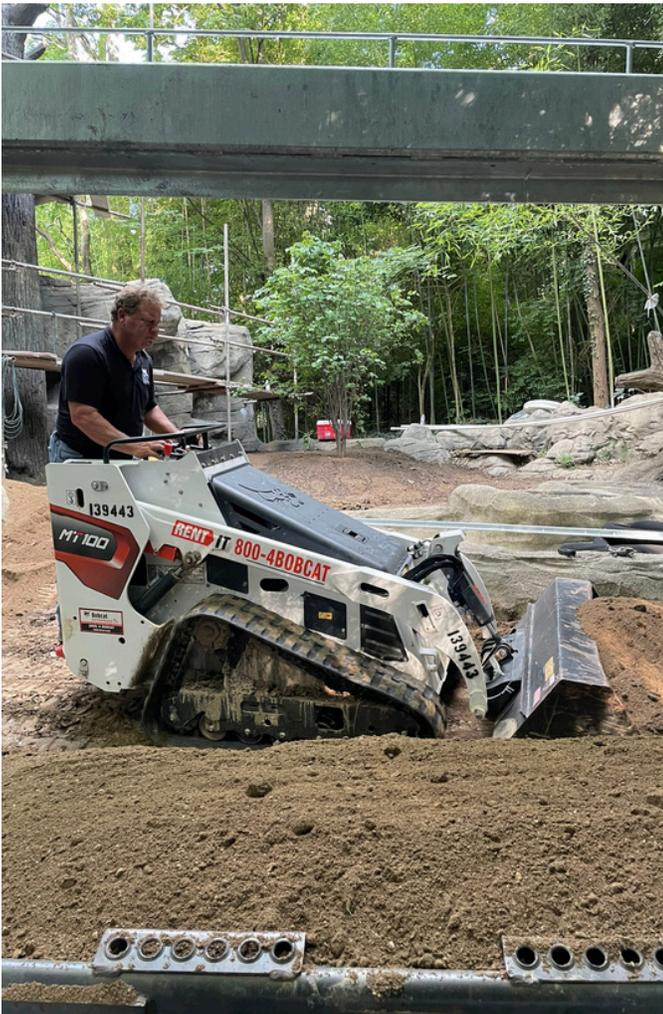


BY THE NUMBERS

- 103 large trees
- 220 shrubs
- 1,225 perennials/grasses/vines
- 480 cubic yards of fresh soil
- A custom-built seating wall using 20 tons of boulder



NEW WORLD PRIMATES HABITAT



Improvements to the former Mueller's Gibbon habitat in Jungle Trails took place intermittently from April through June. Due to limited access, most soil, mulch and plant material was wheelbarrowed in from the visitor entry to Jungle Trails, ultimately creating an intensive but worthwhile naturalistic renovation.



MAINTAINING EXISTING LANDSCAPES

Maintenance of existing landscapes is the most essential role of any Botanical Garden. The same holds true here. While new garden projects in the Zoo and the community always get top billing, it is the continuous and daily detailed horticultural love that allows our gardens to truly thrive. As the modern zoo landscape expands and evolves, maintenance demands grow. If our Botanical Garden isn't living up to the standards we've defined, it makes advancement of our institutional goals impossible.





OUTER PROPERTIES

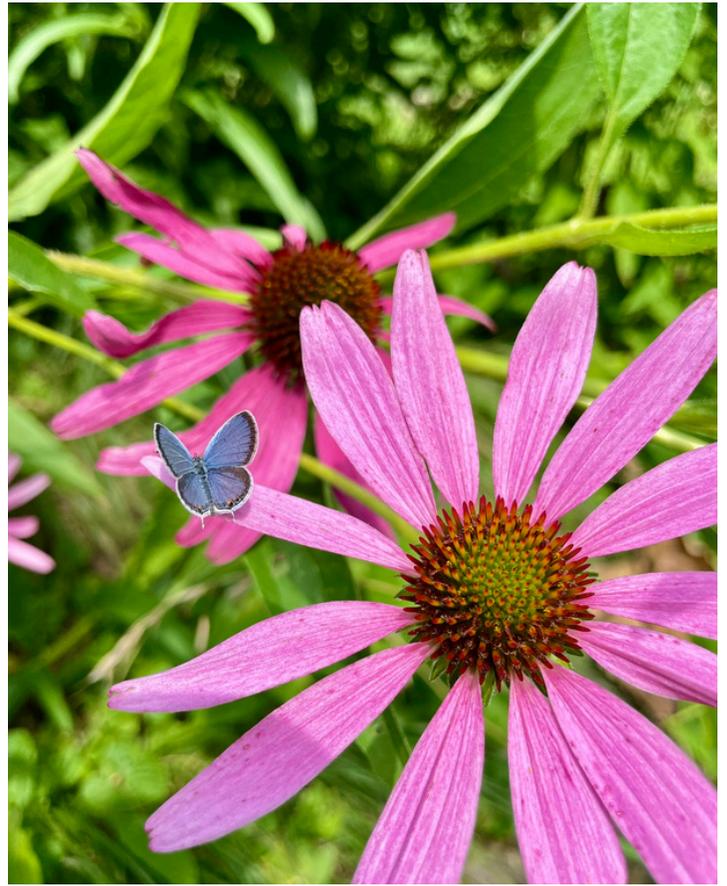
Aside from maintaining nearly 2 acres of grass inside the Zoo perimeter, the horticulture department is responsible for maintaining the landscapes of 94 additional Zoo-owned properties in the surrounding neighborhood and 25 acres of surface parking lots.



SNOW REMOVAL

Every year, Horticulture spreads roughly 150 tons of salt and magnesium on Zoo properties to ensure the safety of our animals, our staff and our visitors. This normally requires 4 plow trucks with salt spreaders, 3 skid steers with brushes, 4 John Deere tractors with brushes and spreaders, a mess of brooms, blowers, squeegees and, most importantly, warm horticulture bodies to operate all of these machines and tools.





COMMUNITY



REDS COMMUNITY MAKEOVER



HOURS DONATED: 1,089

This year, the Cincinnati Reds Community Fund (RCF) wrapped its 16th annual Community Makeover. This is the 13th year that the Zoo has contributed to the event. What started out as a modest tree planting contribution has slowly evolved into an enormous green wave of impact that includes school learning gardens and solar infrastructure. The Reds, along with key sponsors like P&G and Cincinnati Children's, allow us to dream big, reimagining unused lots as bountiful community greenspace. Our increasing contributions to these RCF projects, and to community projects in general, have mirrored our organizational growth as the Greenest Zoo in America.

These are the most transformative and innovative annual community greenspace projects in the region.



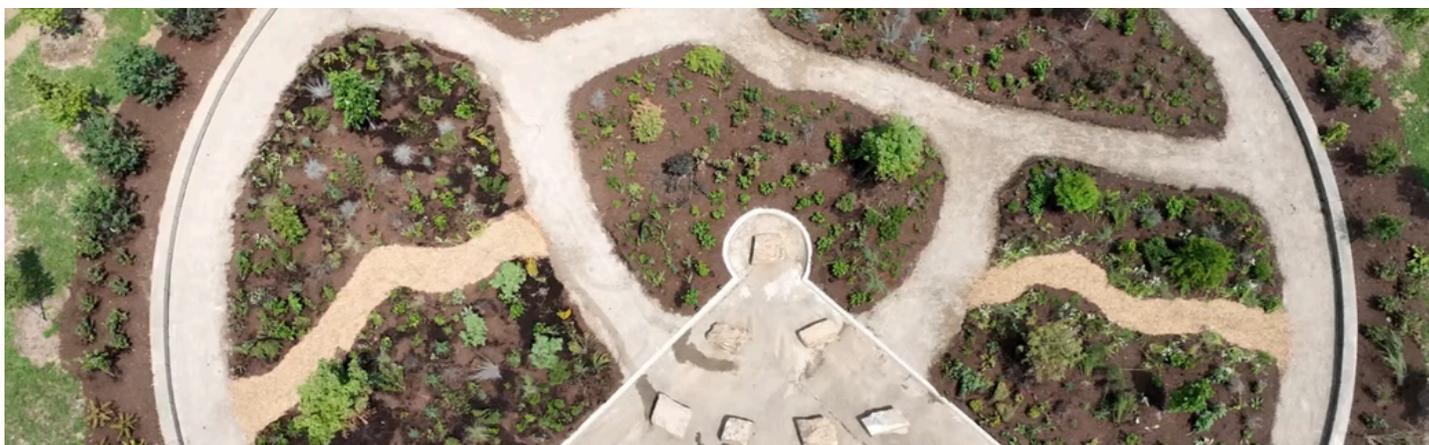
URBAN LEARNING GARDEN @ DR. O'DELL OWENS CENTER FOR LEARNING



Dr. O'dell Owens Center for Learning offers a supportive, individualized educational environment for students in grades K-12 with complex emotional and behavioral needs through restorative practices and trauma-informed care.



The space, formerly a paved bus turnaround, was converted into a 13,000 square foot interactive greenspace and outdoor classroom. It is the 4th Urban Learning Garden we've installed and our most ambitious since Rockdale in 2021. It contains over 1,500 plants of 160 species.



KITCHEN GARDEN @ FREDERICK DOUGLASS ELEMENTARY



Frederick Douglass Elementary School is a Pre-K through 6th grade CPS school with an enrollment of 250 children. Directly across the street is a lot that historically was used as a community garden but had recently fallen into disrepair.

Our revitalization efforts to this space involved heavy invasive species removal and installation of weedmat, gravel base, 12 raised beds with fresh soil, and defined landscape pockets surrounding the space. Classes and after-school groups will be able to produce and eat vegetables and herbs from this space for years to come.

The 4,000 square foot space includes 350 plants, including shade trees, pollinator plants and edible plants.

WELLNESS GARDEN @ HAM.ILTON COUNTY CRISIS CENTER



HOURS DONATED: 670

Through a partnership with Talbert House, we were able to reimagine a neglected backyard space at the new Hamilton County Crisis Center by converting it into a modern Wellness Garden.

The Crisis Center is a centralized hub for crisis and recovery services which includes a primary care clinic, a pharmacy, and long-term support space for inpatients navigating behavioral health changes and transitions back into the community.

Over 1,600 clients a year will have access to the 3,800 square foot Wellness Garden that provides therapeutic engagement with nature. Over 600 plants of 60 species were used in the space.

Plants not only have the power to educate but also to heal.



WELLNESS GARDEN @ HAMILTON COUNTY YOUTH CENTER



HOURS DONATED: 192

Through a partnership with the Hamilton County Youth Center, we transformed a sterile courtyard space into a thriving and colorful Wellness Garden.

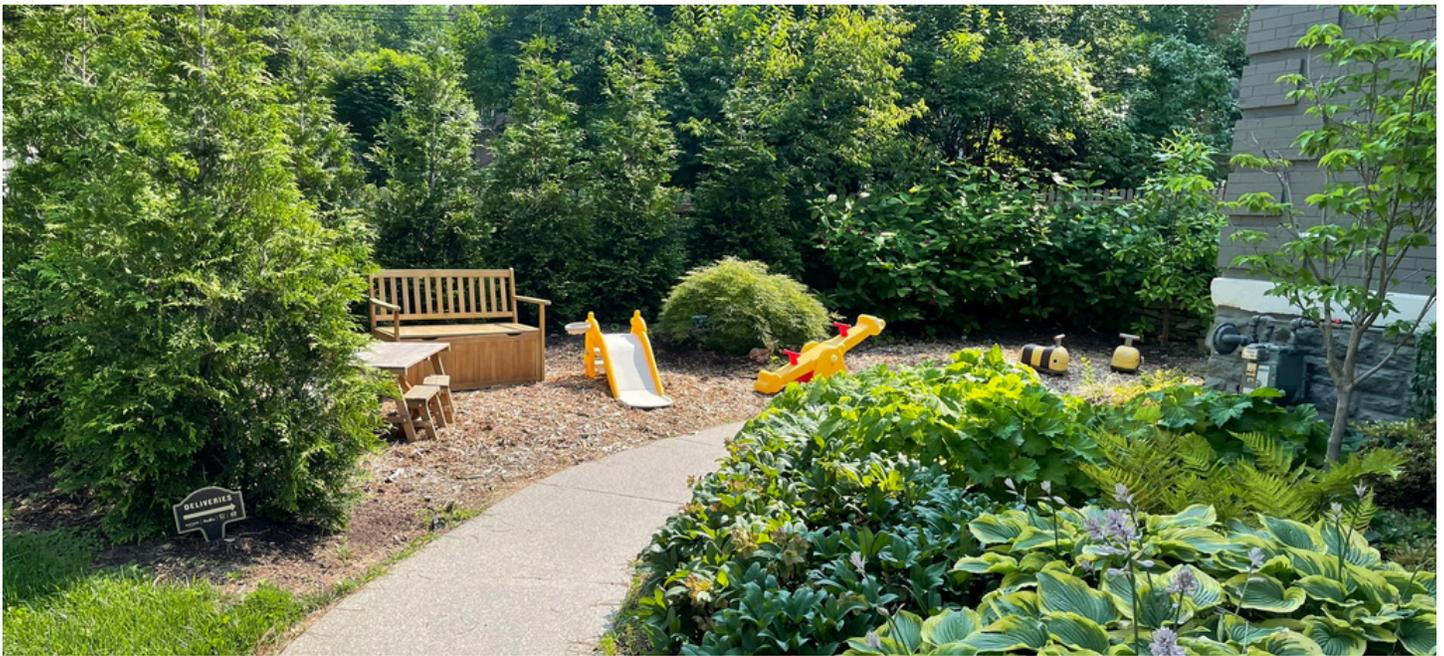
The Youth Center holds 160 young people who are awaiting trial for serious offenses who can't be released while awaiting legal proceedings.

"The garden, it gives me a nice experience, being outside, getting fresh air," one young person says. "It gives me a state of ecstasy, helps me flow, opens up my mind. It's an experience I'd never had, being out here in the garden learning about plants, learning how to nurture plants."

These young people are now stewards of a garden with 250 plants of 35 different species.



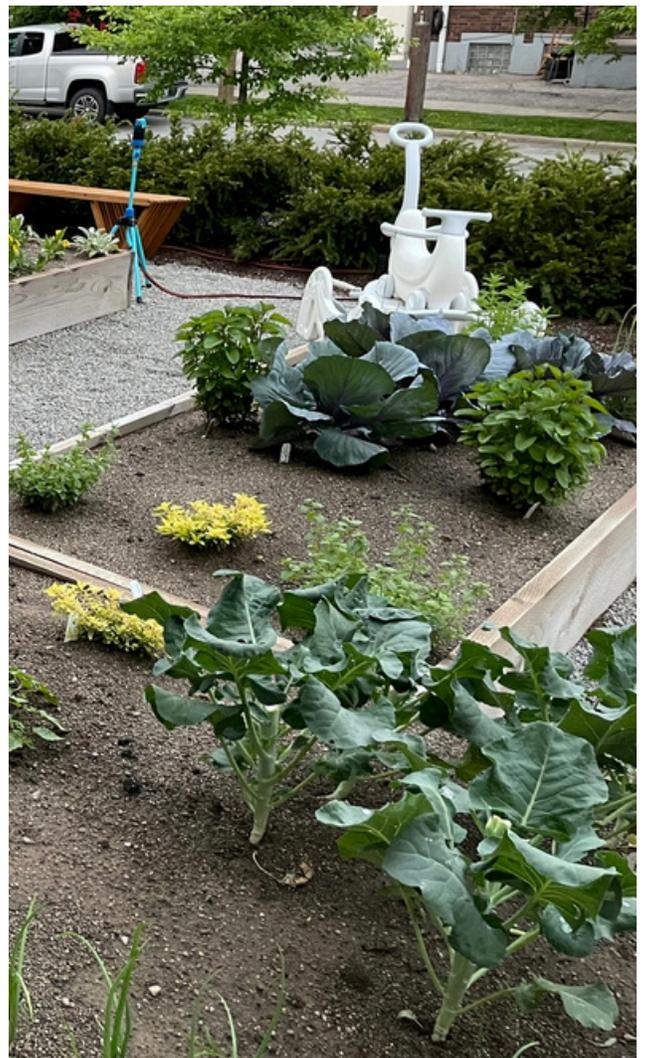
LEARNING GARDEN @ HOLLOWAY HOUSE



HOURS DONATED: 205

The Holloway House Resource Center on Reading Rd. is a critical resource center for teen parents, offering housing, workforce training, financial coaching, health and wellness services, and more.

In 2024 and 2025, we installed a Healing Garden and play area on one side of the house and a Learning Kitchen on the other. This included over 130 ornamental sensory plants and 80 vegetables and annual flowers to lusher the outdoor kitchen.



OTHER COMMUNITY ASSISTS

LET'S GROW LOCAL

HOURS DONATED: 205

Our role in this Parks/Madtrees project involves helping stage and load 150 large trees in Zoo parking lots for dispersal to planting sites, and lending our staff to help lead 200 volunteers in an annual community-wide tree planting (West End this year).



BEST POINT EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

HOURS DONATED: 40

Best Point Education & Behavioral Health helps 16,000 individuals and their families each year across 176 community locations throughout the Tri-State area. With more than 50 community and campus-based programs, Best Point offers a wide range of services including a state-of-the-art campus for autism and preschool services, comprehensive education and behavioral health programs for individuals and families, pediatric mental health urgent care, and a school-based health center.

We assisted in the site prep, plant sourcing and planting of raised pollinator beds for on-campus students this fall.





ROCKDALE URBAN LEARNING GARDEN





BY THE NUMBERS

- 227 students activated in the garden
- 2,318 Rockdale-grown plants donated to school/community members
- 23 school events attended by horticulture staff
- 13 garden newsletters sent to Rockdale faculty
- 26 garden tours for local orgs and green industry professionals
- 16 volunteer maintenance days
- 962 corporate volunteers activated
- 2 community events hosted
- 778 new plants added to the landscape

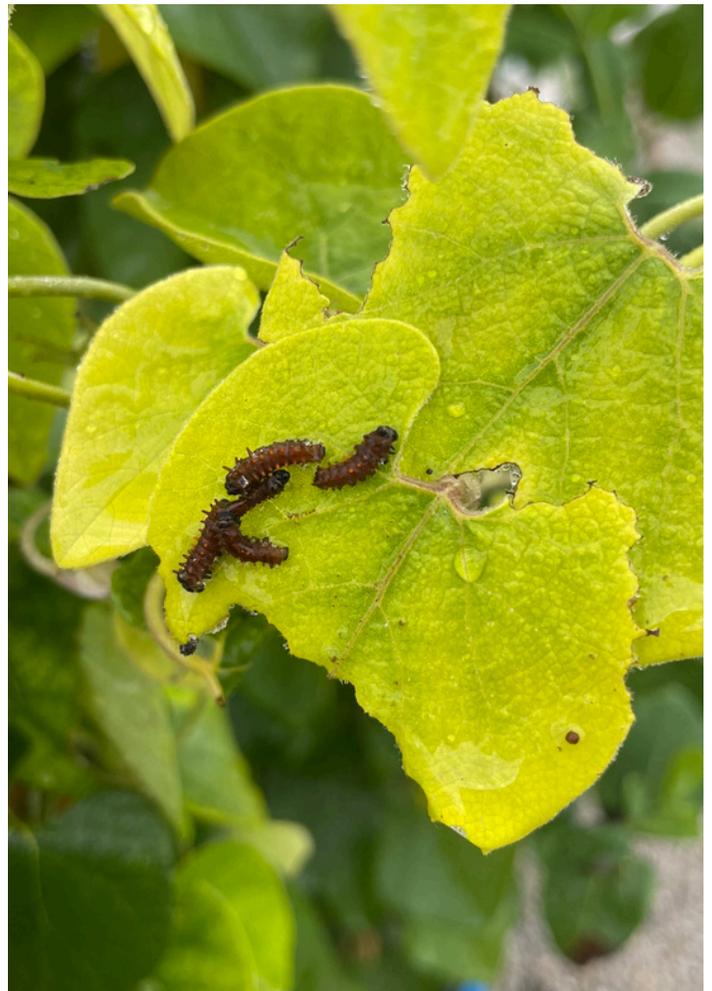
The Rockdale Urban Learning Garden continues to serve as a shining example of the educational impact of large-scale ecological horticulture. Our relationship with Rockdale Academy continues to strengthen and the national recognition of the garden grows.

The garden is now in its 4th year, which means that the Pre-K and first graders from 2021 have grown up alongside this garden. Their human experience has been shaped by the abundance of nature surrounding them. Ideally these daily interactions will pique their curiosity and they will delve further into the world of science and natural beauty as they mature.





BOWYER FARM



Bowyer Farm, home of the Zoo's Native Plant Program, is also a thriving, unique, large-scale nursery complex that nourishes Zoo and community gardens. The quality and abundance of plants we're able to produce at Bowyer Farm mirrors the quality of our gardens.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 6 Native Plant sales
- 13,100 plants sold
- 24,950 plants potted
- 364 species of plants grown
- 875 plants donated to over 15 local organizations

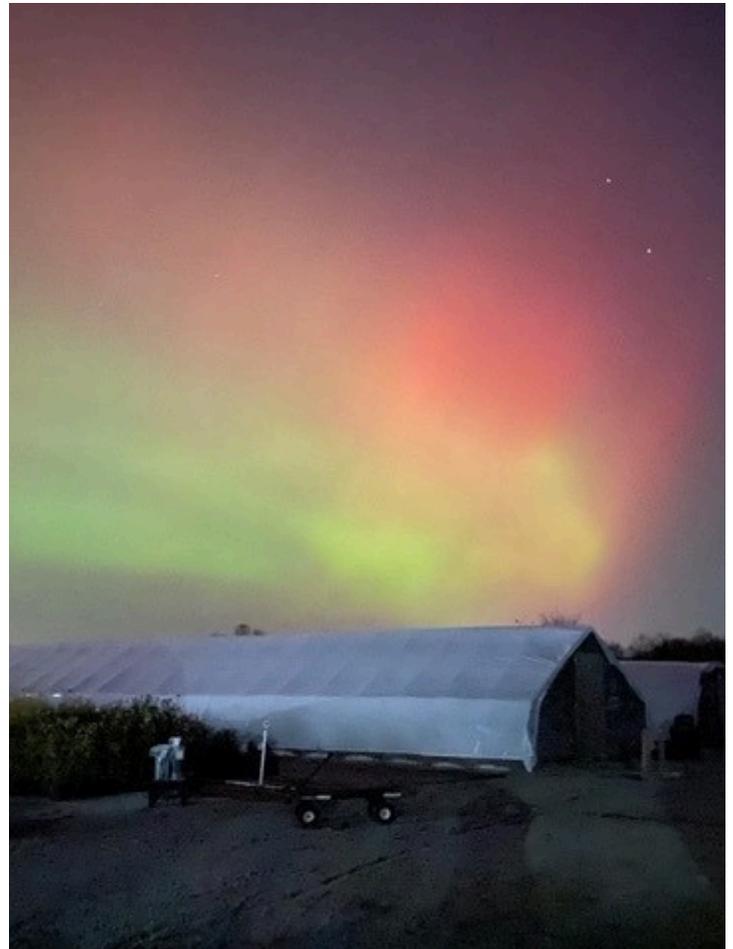


SOLAR BERM PLANTING @ HAMILTON ROAD



Our department stepped in to assist with the ongoing installation of a 4,000 foot long roadside planting to soften the view of our new 2.8 MW solar array in Warren County, down the road from Bowyer Farm.

The mixed-evergreen strip of juniper, spruce, sumac and river cane will create a natural buffer. Hundreds of shrubs will be planted throughout the winter for increased plant diversity and aesthetic value, creating a template for how landscaping around solar arrays can be more sustainable, functional and beautiful.





EDUCATION



SYMPOSIUMS AND CLASSES



We hosted 3 symposiums this year, bringing in a total of 15 plant professionals from across the country to speak for 771 attendees. These symposiums were:

- Sustainable Urban Landscapes
- Plant Trials Day
- Native Plants

We also hosted a virtual Landscaping for the Homeowner webinar, in it's 28th year. This 5-class series taught by Steve Foltz brought in 91 attendees.

GARDEN ENGAGEMENT STATION

This was a banner year for the Garden Engagement Station. Our team of interns and volunteers interacted with over 15,000 Zoo visitors, which is more than double last year's engagement metric.



POLLINATOR WATCH

Our most successful citizen science campaign logged 5,890 individual plant-pollinator interactions in 2026. This data feeds our Pollinator Watch reports, plant sale inventories, pollinator kit lineups, and recommended plant lists for home gardeners.

Look for the new Pollinator Watch report this winter!



TOURS

The Horticulture Department led 31 tours this year at the Zoo and Rockdale, including...

- Mill Creek Alliance
- Cardinal Land Conservancy
- Reimagining the Civic Commons
- Indiana Landscape Association
- Rebecca McMackin
- University of Cincinnati
- Cincinnati State
- Junior League Gardeners
- Warren County Master Gardeners
- Hamilton County Master Gardeners
- Live Oaks
- Clark Montessori



VOLUNTEERS

Horticulture volunteers worked a total of 895 hours in 2025 assisting us with programs and garden maintenance events such as...

- Native Plant sales
- tulip and annual planting
- nursery potting
- weeding and mulching
- garden labeling
- greenhouse covering
- Pollinator Watch
- Garden Engagement Station
- Annual Trials Program

Needless to say, our robust volunteer program allows us to accomplish A LOT!



ERKENBRECHER URBAN LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMATION

BEFORE



AFTER

