

2021

THE POWER OF FONA

FRIENDS
OF THE
NATIONAL
ARBORETUM



FROM THE DIRECTORS

Dear Friends,

The U.S. National Arboretum is no longer a “hidden gem” in Washington, DC — it’s a crowning jewel. Over 700,000 people visited the National Arboretum in 2021 as public interest for getting outdoors and connecting with nature soared. The Arboretum won second place this year for “COVID-19 Silver Lining” in Washington City Paper’s Best of DC survey, second only to working from home.

Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) and the U.S. National Arboretum (USNA) partnered closely to meet the operational needs required from increased visitation. For the first time in over two decades, the USNA implemented traffic restrictions last spring to manage the tens of thousands of visitors on the grounds at any given time. FONA supported the Arboretum’s COVID-19 management strategy and communicated changes with the public. FONA also offered more outdoor events to engage visitors, including Movies in the Meadow, a Fall 5K run, a bulb sale, and a holiday market.

With the National Arboretum’s 100th anniversary in 2027, both FONA and the USNA are committed to making the National Arboretum more accessible to our local communities. The USNA is planning a new main entrance on Bladensburg Road, working with the District and the National Park Service on a pedestrian bridge across the Anacostia River, and exploring options to reopen the M Street gate to pedestrians. FONA continues to create educational opportunities for youth to develop and implement community projects, assist teachers in setting and achieving school garden goals, and reduce the financial barrier for people to engage with programs.

To celebrate Washington Youth Garden’s 50th anniversary, FONA began three exciting anniversary projects. We adapted our garden-based education programs to more deeply engage with teachers and students, expanded our youth development program to offer year-round employment opportunities, and began redesigning our one-acre garden at the Arboretum to make it more engaging and productive.

Thank you for your support. You allow us to bolster not only the National Arboretum, but also our entire DC community. This is just the beginning! We are excited for the future and hope you will join our efforts to ensure the National Arboretum’s success.

Sincerely,

Craven Rand
FONA Executive Director

Dr. Richard T. Olsen
USNA Director



Friends of the National Arboretum 2021.....



5,745

POUNDS OF PRODUCE
HARVESTED & DONATED

4,800

WEDDING & CORPORATE
EVENT GUESTS

2,111 GROW@HOME KITS
SHARED WITH DC STUDENTS

627

RUNNERS, FOREST
BATHERS, AND YOGIS

410

MOVIE GOERS

102 EDUCATORS ENGAGED
FROM 50 SCHOOLS & ORGANIZATIONS



52 LOCAL
PARTNERS

50 YEARS OF WASHINGTON YOUTH GARDEN

44 FONA FIELD NOTES SENT TO 11,200 PEOPLE WEEKLY



17 GREEN AMBASSADORS
DEVELOPED NEW SKILLS & ADDRESSED
FOOD INSECURITY IN THEIR COMMUNITIES



OUR MISSION

Friends of the National Arboretum supports and promotes the U.S. National Arboretum. As their primary 501(c)(3) nonprofit partner, we complement the National Arboretum's work by ensuring its research and gardens are a resource for DC residents and tourists from around the world.

HOW WE SUPPORT

We advocate for the National Arboretum in local and federal government, support improved visitor experiences, and bolster infrastructure projects. We collaborate with the Arboretum and Agricultural Research Service and ensure the Arboretum has strong buy-in from leadership and partners.

HOW WE PROMOTE

We invite visitors of all ages to form deep and mindful relationships with nature through education programs, recreation programs, and events. For 50 years, our education programs at Washington Youth Garden have nurtured curious minds and healthy bodies by connecting them to food, the land, and each other.



POWER OF OUR PARTNERSHIPS



Friends of the National Arboretum's strong partnerships with the U.S. National Arboretum and dozens of other organizations across Washington, DC allow us to better support and promote the National Arboretum.

In 2021, we:

ENSURED ACCESS TO GREENSPACE

FONA helped the USNA ensure the grounds were open and safe for over 700,000 visitors to connect with nature. We supported the National Arboretum's COVID-19 management strategy as demand for the Arboretum's 450 acres of greenspace rose dramatically in 2021. We worked closely with USNA leadership, shared updates about the reopening phases through our communications network, and fielded public feedback.

INVESTED IN EDUCATION

We laid the groundwork for a treetop canopy trail to complement our environmental education efforts. FONA is working closely with leadership at the Arboretum, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Agricultural Research Service on all aspects of this project from design to build.

STRENGTHENED LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

FONA increased its visibility and community presence through collaborations with 52 organizations throughout Washington, DC. These partners helped us adapt our education programs to better meet the needs of students, teachers, and families. They also helped us connect people with nature at the Arboretum. For the first time this year, we offered Movies in the Meadow, a Bulb Sale, a Christmas Tree Sale and Holiday Market, and pay-what-you-can tickets for forest bathing.

"We absolutely loved teaming up with Washington Youth Garden and Casey Trees for an incredible hyperlocal, hands-on learning experience."

— Urban Adventure Squad

POWER OF OUR PROGRAMS



FONA PROMOTES THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM THROUGH EDUCATION PROGRAMS, RECREATION PROGRAMS, & EVENTS

POWER OF OUR PROGRAMS — EDUCATION

5,745 pounds of produce harvested & donated to local families

73 volunteers worked 460 hours in the garden

3,000 vegetable seedlings donated to DC school gardens



“We discovered WYG this summer after over two decades of living in the Washington, DC/Maryland area, and it was truly amazing!

The energy in the garden is soothing, therapeutic and calming, and it made us feel so good to help harvest food that would nourish someone in need in the community.”

— Dawn Singleton,
Garden Volunteer

WASHINGTON YOUTH GARDEN

Objective: Provide a welcoming and inviting space at the National Arboretum for the DC community to learn and grow.

Washington Youth Garden (WYG), our one-acre garden on the grounds of the National Arboretum, has nurtured curious minds and healthy bodies for 50 years by connecting young people to food, the land, and each other. FONA's youth education programs take place at WYG and at partner schools across the city. We were excited to welcome volunteers and visitors back into the garden in spring 2021 after being closed to the public in 2020.

Produce Distribution

This year, we grew and donated 5,745 pounds of fresh food to local students and families. We distributed this food to families during the school year through our partner schools and throughout the year through YMCA Calomiris Program Center, KidPower DC, DC Fridge Collective, and DC Central Kitchen.

Growing Techniques

WYG is open for all Arboretum visitors to explore, play in, and learn from. We demonstrate organic growing techniques that gardeners can incorporate into their home or school gardens to reduce pests, improve soil health, and maximize food production. Our trellising and garden bed designs also showcase innovative ways to grow food vertically and to maximize space.

Garden Supplies

We grew and shared over 3,000 vegetable seedlings with school gardens around DC to bolster access to fresh food across the city. We also provided schools with tools and equipment for school garden workdays.

POWER OF OUR PROGRAMS — EDUCATION

SCHOOL GARDEN SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Objective: Empower teachers to connect students with garden-based education.

Garden Science

During the 2020-21 school year, our Garden Science program connected students from four DC partner schools with garden science education and fresh food. We taught 187 Garden Science lessons, 42 of which were in outdoor garden classrooms, and hosted 51 virtual and in-person school garden club events. We shared fresh food grown in Washington Youth Garden with students and families at these schools through 50 free produce distributions.

Virtual Classroom Support

We hosted 77 Virtual Farm Field Trips during the 2020-21 school year to teach students about fundamental garden and environmental science, including topics like the parts of a plant, composting, and ecosystems. We also distributed 2,111 Grow@Home kits to 26 different schools and educational institutions in spring 2021. These kits allowed students to practice the scientific method, run their own experiments, and create nutritious meals from what they grew.

Professional Development

During the 2020-21 school year, we piloted the Educator Coaching Program with 14 teachers from Title 1 schools. This program provided educators with hands-on technical assistance, coaching, and direct education. Our summer professional development trained 37 DC teachers from 20 different schools in school garden coordination and maintenance, curriculum integration, outdoor teaching strategies, and resource development.

In the 2021-22 school year, we are connecting all these programs under a single School Garden Support Program. This will allow us to connect more deeply with DC teachers and students and build strong, sustainable school garden programs throughout DC.

102 educators engaged from 50 schools and organizations

2,111 Grow@Home kits shared with DC students

187 Garden Science lessons taught in classrooms



“Thank you for giving me the confidence to take on our school garden! We’ve been using it weekly with our kindergarteners.”

**— Rickita Perry,
Turner Elementary School**

POWER OF OUR PROGRAMS — EDUCATION

1 community project addressing food insecurity in DC completed by Guild members

816 hours spent developing new skills by 8 Farm Crew members



"I've learned how to kickstart a project if I want to make a change. From conducting interviews to networking, I feel competent as a concerned community member."

— Aliyah B., Guild Member

GREEN AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Objective: Provide year-round employment and development opportunities for high school students.

In 2021, we expanded our Green Ambassador Program (GAP) beyond the summer Farm Crew into the academic year so students have year-round opportunities to learn and grow.

Farm Crew

Participants begin GAP in the Farm Crew, a six-week paid summer internship where they learn hands-on skills such as gardening, cooking, and carpentry as well as interpersonal skills like communication and collaboration. In 2021, Farm Crew empowered eight high school students to connect with peers, build community, and explore potential "green" careers.

Guild

Participants then continue the program through the Guild, a paid internship during the academic year. They apply skills learned during the Farm Crew to implement community action projects that address food insecurity. This year, nine Guild members built structures to protect DC Fridge Collective's community fridges from weather damage and provide more shelf space so community members can access much-needed amenities.

Leaders

After participating in the Farm Crew and Guild internships, Green Ambassadors are invited to mentor incoming Farm Crew participants, deepen their knowledge through garden internships, and broaden connections through an alumni network. In 2021, three Green Ambassadors worked as paid garden assistants, mentoring Farm Crew members and helping our garden team grow and harvest over 5,000 pounds of food.

POWER OF OUR PROGRAMS — RECREATION & EVENTS

Objective: Provide unique opportunities for people to connect with nature.

Recreation

In 2021, we eliminated the financial barrier for people to access our forest bathing mindfulness program by implementing a “pay what you can” ticket model.

Our strong local partnerships also allowed us to offer new and expanded opportunities for visitors to connect with nature at the National Arboretum. For the first time ever, we offered nine spring yoga classes with Blue Sky Yoga and hosted two outdoor Movies in the Meadow with the National Bonsai Foundation, Japan America Society of Washington DC, and the French Embassy. We also offered more unique after-hours photography workshops this year with Capital Photography Center. Partnering with Pacers Running allowed us to safely and smoothly host 224 runners during our Fall 5K.

Events

Our public and private events connected people more deeply to the Arboretum's collections, horticulture, and gardening. We safely hosted 4,800 guests during 48 weddings and private events which were held throughout the Arboretum's collections and gardens. Digging In, our new virtual event series, connected 140 FONA members and stakeholders with wildlife and horticultural experts. New this year, our fall Bulb Sale and winter Christmas Tree Sale and Holiday Market offered seasonal opportunities for visitors to engage with home gardening and family-fun activities at the Arboretum.

4,800 guests attended weddings and corporate events

627 people explored the Arboretum during our 5K run, forest bathing walks, and yoga classes

410 film fans enjoyed outdoor movies in the Ellipse Meadow



“Forest bathing reminded me that I need to get outside and ground myself more. Not just for recreation but to truly stop and pay attention to myself, my body and the earth.”

— Forest Bathing Participant

In 2021, we began celebrating WYG's 50th anniversary by adapting our education programs to better serve the needs of students, teachers, and families in our community for the next half century.

Washington Youth Garden was established in 1971 on the grounds of the U.S. National Arboretum to teach local elementary students horticultural and life skills. Since then, WYG has grown into an award-winning education program, supporting thousands of under-resourced students all over Washington, DC for the past half century.



American Horticultural Society's Jane L. Taylor Award Winner

In 2021, Washington Youth Garden received the Jane L. Taylor Award, which is "given to an individual, organization, or program that has inspired and nurtured future horticulturists through efforts in children's and youth gardening."

LOOKING AHEAD

Friends of the National Arboretum is committed to the U.S. National Arboretum's future. In preparation for the National Arboretum's 100th anniversary in 2027, we are investing in three major projects:

WASHINGTON YOUTH GARDEN

We are elevating Washington Youth Garden as a premier destination in our region for garden-based education and nature play. We are reimagining our one-acre garden at the National Arboretum to make it more engaging, productive, and easier to maintain. We will continue adapting and expanding education programs to better support children, families, and teachers in our community.

CANOPY TRAIL

Our treetop canopy trail will immerse children and families in the National Arboretum's trees. Located in the forest behind Washington Youth Garden, this canopy trail will engage people of all ages with tree science and environmental education. We are prioritizing accessibility and experiential learning in this trail's design.

CAPITOL COLUMNS

As the group responsible for bringing the Capitol Columns to the National Arboretum in 1990, FONA is committed to maintaining them so visitors can enjoy them for decades to come. Current priorities include the ongoing maintenance of the water feature and lights surrounding the Columns while we develop a strategy for the complete restoration of the Columns themselves.



Thank you to all our supporters, donors, and partners!

When you support FONA, you invest in the future of the U.S. National Arboretum

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*As of December 14, 2021

We will publish our complete donor list in early 2022



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*As of December 14, 2021

We will publish our complete partner list in early 2022

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