

Title

Heritage Garden at McClanahan Park

Contact

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Description:

Gardening provides multiple entry points to explore our connection to nature and participate in generative practices that heal and restore the earth. In the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia) area, there exists a rich history of native plants and their traditional uses within diverse racial and ethnic communities. This history serves as a powerful means to challenge and dispel stereotypes that suggest a lack of racial diversity in outdoor spaces. Moreover, it provides a unique opportunity to elevate and celebrate culturally diverse horticultural knowledge, practices, and traditions. By acknowledging and amplifying these cultural connections to the natural world, we can foster a greater sense of inclusion, appreciation, and understanding among all individuals, while promoting a more equitable and diverse outdoor experience in the DMV region.

The Heritage Garden at McClanahan Park will examine native and invasive gardening practices through the lens of the African American and Indigenous experiences. This unique initiative aims to contextualize the historical and cultural significance of gardening practices within Black and Indigenous communities while recognizing them as acts of cultural resilience. This approach highlights the importance of recognizing and appreciating the deep-rooted connections between gardening, cultural heritage, and the enduring spirit of these communities.

The program:

- explores the connection between horticulture and culturally-rooted traditions,
- uncovers the specific historical significance of native plants through scientific research, while intentionally incorporating inclusive storytelling, memoirs, and the experiences of notable residents from the DMV area.
- provides hands-on native planting and invasive removal training that supports the adoption of generative gardening practices.
- celebrate the rich diversity our natural ecosystem by increasing the untold experiences of African American/Indigenous people.

Project Background

To obtain certification in the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) Master Naturalist program, trainees are required to identify and participate in community-based projects. These projects serve as an essential component of the certification process, allowing trainees to actively engage with their local community and contribute to the preservation and understanding of the Anacostia Watershed and the Maryland ecosystem. The education team applying for naturalist certification has identified its project aim for this year as designing educational materials and program that support community and place-based participatory nature education. The Heritage Garden project strand, led by AWS trainee, Tracie Yorke, is designed to improve one-on-one

relationships with nature and builds upon the previous trainee cohorts work around native and invasive planting.

Tracie was inspired to create this project based on her City of Hyattsville sponsored participation in the AWS' Watershed Stewardship Academy program last year. The City of Hyattsville offered scholarships for Hyattsville residents to participate in the hybrid program which aims to empower and assist community leaders in their efforts to identify and tackle pollution issues in the streams and rivers located in the Anacostia Watershed. Tracie has actively taken part in forest bathing activities offered in Hyattsville, immersing herself in the therapeutic and rejuvenating experiences of being in nature. (She and her family are featured in the Hyattsville film "Trees: The Lungs of Our Community"). Additionally, Tracie has contributed to the community by engaging in a community service project, specifically painting the driveway of Driskell Park to commemorate its renaming. Through her participation, Tracie demonstrates her commitment to both personal well-being and making a positive impact within her local community. Tracie's professional background includes more than 15 years of experience working in the education, technology, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) fields. Currently, she is pursuing a Ph.D. in community engagement at Point Park University.

Project Components:

Park Design: The Park functions as a dynamic living space that serves as both a classroom and laboratory, providing opportunities to explore native plants of regional importance. Reflecting the culturally diverse history of our region, the garden intentionally incorporates plants that hold historical significance to African American and Indigenous communities. However, this inclusion does not mean that other native plants or stories outside of these experiences are excluded. The garden embraces a holistic approach, welcoming all native plants and narratives, fostering an inclusive environment that celebrates the rich tapestry of our region's natural and cultural heritage.

Species List: A comprehensive species list specifically tailored for McClanahan Park would be developed. This list would not only encompass the scientific information about native plants but also include their cultural history and significance. A future planting schedule would be created to increase native heritage plant representation in the park. Special consideration would be given to signage and interactive media that could inform and engage diverse audiences about project themes and goals of the project. Currently, there are plants with Black/Indigenous culturally significance that are already thriving at the McClanahan Park site.

Trainings: The community will have access to a list of training dates, allowing individuals to participate in hands-on sessions. These trainings will provide an opportunity for participants to delve into the cultural and environmental significance of plants within the heritage garden. They will gain an understanding of the issues and challenges related to native and invasive plants, as well as learn techniques for removing and managing invasive species. Furthermore, the trainings will guide participants in adopting restorative gardening practices both within their gardens, yards, and in-house planting.

Project Outcomes

- The Heritage Garden at McClanahan Park will **increase participation** in the City's existing invasive removal planting programming.
- Provide **increased opportunities** for Hyattsville residents to engage in culturally diverse programming in the outdoors.
- **Provide information** on restorative gardening practices that help to support the Hyattsville, Maryland and world natural ecosystem.
- **Increase awareness** of City resources to help residents in environmental sustainability.
- **Increase data collection** efforts on citizen impact on Hyattsville's natural ecosystem.

Future Ideas

Tracie is also interested in designing youth based education/nature activities that explore the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Student will learn how to AI build training models like the one in iNaturalist, that assists people with plant species identification. This project could support workforce development as well.

Smaller heritage garden sites could also be piloted or implemented at other sites throughout Hyattsville that are underutilized or are heavily trafficked.