

## After MG training, what's next?

### **Rutgers Environmental Steward program**

#### **By Miriam Taub, Class of 2011**

Smadar Shemmesh, Class of 2017, has gone to the next level in terms of horticultural training. In late fall 2021, she enrolled in the [Rutgers Environmental Steward](#) (RES) program, which trains volunteers how to take action to help solve environmental problems in their communities.

Smadar, who volunteers at Thielke Arboretum and has managed the Center for Food Action's pantry garden in Englewood for seven years,



Photo by Miriam Taub

**Smadar Shemmesh in the Center for Food Action pantry garden.**

learned about the RES program from another Thielke volunteer. She thought the word stewardship was "interesting," she said, and decided to learn more.

According to the RES website, the program teaches participants about the impacts of climate change and the important environmental issues affecting New Jersey enabling them to help solve local

community problems. The program began in 2005 and has trained 1,204 volunteers so far. The Class of 2023 has 88 students.

"Anyone who is interested in learning how they can protect the environment in New Jersey and lessen the impact of climate change should take this program," said Michele Bakacs, RES state program coordinator, in an email. "Classes are online with in-person field trips by region, so stewards learn about issues in their communities." The cost to participate is \$260.

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## **From the President's Desk**

### **By Melody Corcoran, Class of 2016**

Ever seen bird's nest fungi? These fungi are usually about one-half inch in diameter and look just like tiny birds' nests containing a clutch of eggs. They are saprotrophs — decomposers that absorb the nutrients they need from dead organic material.



They are most often found in moist, shady areas growing on decaying wood, mulch, dead plant material, and sometimes animal droppings. These fungi are related to gilled mushrooms, but their structure and method of spore dispersal are entirely different.

The bird's nest fungus is attached to its substrate by typical fungal mycelia. But that is where its structural similarity to other fungi ends. Bird's nest

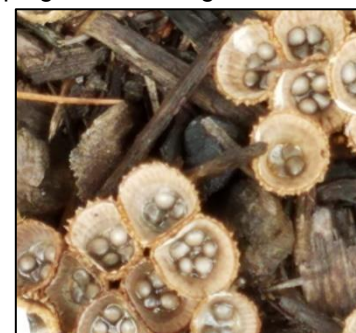


Photo by Melody Corcoran

**Bird's nest fungi.** Bird's nest fungi are made up of a cup (peridium), which holds the spore containing eggs (peridioles). These eggs are attached to the cup by a filament (funicular cord) with a sticky end (hapteron). The filament is several inches long and packed inside an envelope (purse) underneath each egg.

When a drop of water from rain or irrigation lands in the cup, the eggs are splashed out of the cup. The filament

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## ***Rutgers Environmental Steward program: A next step after MG training***

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Students are required to attend online classes from January-May and spend 60 hours in an internship project of their choice. At the time she took the classes, Smadar said she was living in Israel (seven hours ahead of Eastern time), so she was up until 3 am to attend the 2½-hour weekly sessions.

For her internship project, Smadar created a two-session workshop — part lecture, part demonstration and hands-on work — held at Thielke Arboretum where she volunteers as an education docent. This wasn't Smadar's first teaching experience, by the way. Smadar said she is an NJ Certified Language Arts teacher and a Judaic Studies teacher. She's taught in public schools in Bergen County and in private day schools.

In the first class, held in fall 2022, Smadar instructed participants how to gather and save native perennial seeds. Smadar said she explained the process of "seed stratification" and "scarification," which strengthens the native seeds and prepares them for germination in the spring.

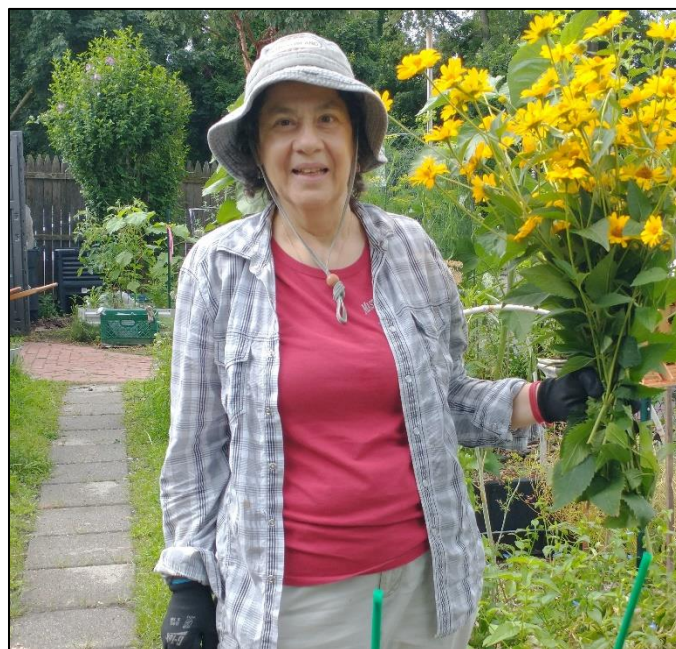
Then she showed participants how to create "mini greenhouses" from clean gallon jugs. She also distributed the [Going Native](#) brochure produced by [Jersey-Friendly Yards](#) and a handout from the University of Missouri Cooperative Extension with detailed instructions to build a mini greenhouse. Over the winter, she kept in touch with the Thielke participants via email.

The second session, held in early 2023, was offered at no cost to participants from the fall session who wished to have a refresher on the process of creating the mini greenhouse. Smadar said she explained the benefits of using the mini greenhouse to start seeds outdoors.

The RES program, Smadar said, has strict guidelines for the projects. First, she had to submit a proposal, which was reviewed and approved by a supervisor. Once approved, she needed to keep the supervisor informed of her progress and to submit details of her project hours through Better Impact. She has until Aug. 31 to submit her "deliverables" (flyers, photos, brochures, project boards, etc.) before she can be certified as a Rutgers Environmental Steward.

"The project doesn't have to be a big project," she explained. "Homework is involved; there's a survey after each lecture. It's not for the faint of heart. It's very, very thorough and well-run."

Smadar said the RES program "is for people who want to become actively involved in changes all around them. The way I did it — seed saving — was to show people



**Smadar Shemmesh**

you can save seeds and, by extension, be beneficial to the wildlife around you."

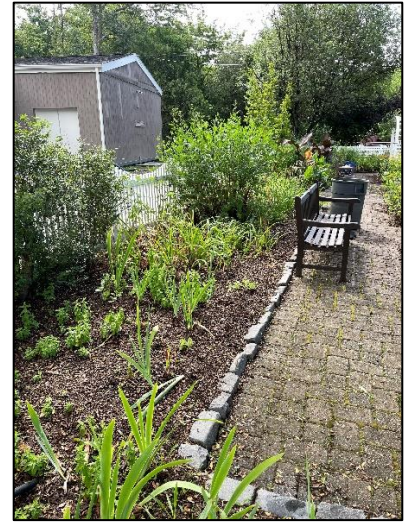
If you're a Master Gardener, she continued, "This is a really nice add-on. You get to see how things around you work, such as local government. This is good for people who want to become more involved in their community."

Are there any environmental advocacy issues that Smadar sees in her future? "Ultimately, I would like to establish an 'open flyway' that leads from the Hudson River along the Edgewater shore to the Meadowlands and the Hackensack River," she said. "Open air space is at a premium in this area. Right now, there's so much development, quite a few high-rise condominiums along the western shore of the Hudson River, especially in Edgewater."

She continued: "There's so much avian activity that I observe where I live on the side of the cliffs in North Bergen. Egrets, hawks, geese, etc., all flying to the Hudson River and back toward the Meadowlands, Hackensack River, and beyond."

Smadar plans to offer the two-session workshop again since it was such a positive experience. "I enjoyed being able to reach out, educate individuals, and open their eyes to the possibilities of enhancing their natural environment," she said.

## VOLUNTEER SITE NEWS



Photos provided by Sharon Ma

### **Before and after at the Bergen County Zoo**

Volunteers dramatically transformed the zoo gardens during a July work session. The “after” pic shows how much we improved the area by clearing the weeds and mulching the beds. We will gradually add more perennials once we have the weeds under control. It proves the saying “There is no garden without gardeners!” From left: Sharon Ma, Class of 2018; Dineen Policano (2023); Hugo Steiner (2023); Sharon La Monica (2022); and Anita Hall-Davis (2022). Other team members are Jeffrey Chan (2011); Louise Mullin (2018); Marsha Mandel (2018); and Dylan Grana (2022). Join the group Mondays from 8-11 am (summer hours); hours are Mondays 9 am-noon at other times of the year.

- Sharon Ma, Class of 2018

### **They had a blast at Teaneck Creek Conservancy and Garretson Forge & Farm**



Photo by Miriam Taub, Class of 2011

Considering the heat and humidity, the volunteer turnout for the recent clean-up events at TCC (July 13) and Garretson (July 20) was terrific. The “blasts” are one-day events to get lots of work done, while meeting other MGs, and earning volunteer hours. We hope other site coordinators see the value in having many hands help with needed work. “The blast was a success,” said Paula Leibowitz, TCC site coordinator and Class of 2013. “The labyrinth looked amazing.”

TCC volunteers worked in the Peace Labyrinth removing weeds and sprucing up. Front row from left: Mary Orlando, Class of 2023; Kathleen Farley, TCC executive director; Paula Leibowitz, site coordinator (2013); Linda DeWolfe (2023); Liz Gil, site coordinator liaison (2019); and Stephanie Landau, TCC associate. Back row from left: Peter Cammarano, Susan Truesdell, and Robert Nunes, all Class of 2023.

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*(‘Blast,’ continued from page 3)*



*Photos by Lida Gellman*

Left side of bench front to back: Donna Picheria, Class of 2023; Noel Schulz (2016); and Melody Corcoran (2016); back row: Paulette Reilly, local volunteer; Liz Gil, volunteer site liaison (2019); April Barth (2017); right side of bench front to back: Peter Cammarano (2023); Scott Japko (2021); and Beverly Malabrigo (2023). Photo below from left: Karen Norton, Janet Stofkoper, and Jeanne Etter, all Class of 2023.

At Garretson, volunteers cleared the long walkway in the front of the house while the back walkway leading to the house was cleared and crabgrass removed from between the stones. Also, weeds and crabgrass were removed from the steps and walkway leading onto the front porch. “A mighty task,” noted Lida Gellman, site coordinator and Class of 1999.

“It was a very successful day and a great opportunity for everyone to meet each other and socialize,” Lida reported. “After a lunch break under our champion chestnut tree, the group continued on a tour of the gardens and house.”



## WEBINARS

*All times are Eastern.*

**Aug. 9, 4-5 pm:** AARP Virtual Community Center sponsors Healthy Living: All About Herbs. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register. AARP membership not required.

**Aug. 9, 6:30 pm:** The Nature Conservancy and Ohio State University Extension sponsor Living Your Best Garden: Fall Gardens. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Aug. 10, 7 pm:** Laurelwood Arboretum sponsors Native Groundcovers: Living Mulch. Fee: \$10 members; \$20 non-members. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Aug. 16, noon-1 pm:** Penn State Extension sponsors Advice from the Woods: Ask Our Experts. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Aug. 17, 1-2:30 pm:** Penn State Extension sponsors Home Food Preservation: Tomatoes and Salsa. Fee: \$5. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

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*(President’s desk, continued from page 1)*

attaching the egg to the cup stretches out until it breaks, and the egg is launched into the air. The egg can travel up to 3 or 4 feet. The sticky end of the filament will attach the egg to a blade of grass, twig, or any nearby object it contacts.

When the egg dries, it splits open and releases its spores. There can be up to 30 million spores in one egg. It is also thought that herbivore mammals may ingest the fungi when feeding and spread the spore containing eggs in their droppings.

If you find bird’s nest fungi in your yard, you may want to move them away from your house or car. Once the eggs are attached to something by their sticky filament, they are difficult to remove. But there is no need to remove them from your yard. They are good guys working to break down organic matter and add compost to your soil.

Also, they are too cool!

## HORTICULTURE

### **Question: Why do we visit gardens? Answer: For inspiration**

**By Janet Schulz, Class of 1988**

I, for one, visit as many gardens as I can for many reasons. I especially want to see how people have designed their spaces and what plant material they used and then sit, relax, enjoy, and look for inspiration.

Inspiration comes in many forms. I see what plants go together in ways I might not have thought of. I'm a good copier, and there were a few times I've been inspired to go home and try my hand at making what I had seen. It happened again a few weeks ago when I visited the garden of Master Gardeners Cynthia Drennan and her husband Ed (both Class of 2019).

Cynthia has lived in her house since childhood and constructed many projects using recycled material. The project that inspired me the most was made of clay pots. I have been in love with terra cotta for many years after being inspired at a different garden. This led me to collect many terra cotta items, and soon a few of my friends started to contribute to my collection. Alas what to do with them all?

I found my answer at Cynthia and Ed's: To construct a terra cotta tower using as many clay pots as I could. Thanks to Cynthia and Ed, I can now park my car in the garage again. And my advice to you is visit as many gardens as you can. Be inspired!



*Photos by Janet Schulz*

Inspiration! Photo above left is of the clay pot sculpture in the garden of Cynthia and Ed Drennan. After a tour of the Drennan garden, Janet Schulz found a use for the clay pots stored in her garage. Photo above right is Janet's clay pot sculpture.

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### **From the Internet**

#### **'Invasive Species of the Month'**

Rutgers Cooperative Extension has created a new series to highlight those organisms that are non-native to New Jersey and cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. It's the "Invasive Species of the Month." Click [here](#) to read about silver grass, *Miscanthus sinensis*, a popular ornamental plant that's spreading from yards and commercial and public landscapes into natural areas. It's July's invader.

#### **'Plant of the month'**

Meanwhile, Rutgers Plant of the Month for August is the Jack-in-the-pulpit. Click [here](#) to read what Bruce Crawford, manager of horticulture for the Morris County Park Commission, has to say about this plant.

#### **Low-maintenance container plants**

If you're looking for low-maintenance plants, Better Homes & Gardens suggests 10 of them for containers placed in the sun or shade. Click [here](#) to read the article.

#### **Tips for sustainable landscaping**

Rutgers associate professors and extension agents Michele Bakacs and Amy Rowe discussed sustainable landscaping/lawn care June 30 on Alison Stewart's radio show "All of It" on WNYC. Click [here](#) to listen to the 29-minute segment.

#### **Be ready for ticks**

Click [here](#) for the University of Rhode Island's guide to ticks. Learn about tick activity by month in the New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania region; tick-borne diseases; how ticks enter your home; and more.