

News Letter

City Hall, Iowa City, Iowa 52240
www.projectgreen.org

GROW TO
REACH
ENVIRONMENTAL
EXCELLENCE
NOW



FALL 2025

Second Sunday 2026 Winter Garden Forums



Project GREEN and the **Iowa City Public Library** present the Second Sunday Garden Forums series for 2026. The forums will be offered on **January 11, February 8, and March 8**, in the Iowa City Public Library, 123 S. Linn St., in Meeting Room A, from 2 to 4 p.m. **Project GREEN** programs are free and open to the public. Presentations will also stream live on Iowa City Public Library's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/thelibrarychannel>. Gardeners can earn CE's for the programs.



Jason Taylor

JANUARY 11, 2026 BUR OAK LAND TRUST: STRATEGIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION.

Jason Taylor, Executive Director, has been instrumental in promoting land conservation efforts in the region, ensuring that natural habitats are preserved for future generations. His leadership at Bur Oak illustrates his commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement. Jason previously worked at VentureLab.org and Project Lead The Way, providing innovative curriculum strategies for transformative learning experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, and was a key driver for innovative curriculum strategies and program development. He previously served in the United States Marine Corps and earned a B.S. in Environmental Science and an M.A. in Educational Measurement and Statistics from the University of Iowa.

meet the county's environmental standards. She also manages the county's Soil Health Program and represents Johnson County on the Middle Iowa Watershed Management Authorities (MIWMAI), advancing regional efforts to protect and restore water resources. Kasey brings broad experience in water resource management, having worked across all levels of government, as well as in the private sector. She holds a B.S. in Environmental Science and an M.S. in Environmental Engineering from the University of Iowa.



Ben Rowold

MARCH 8, 2026 MONITORING KENT PARK BLUEBIRDS — LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Ben Rowold is a dedicated volunteer with the Johnson County Conservation Board. For more than a decade, he has combined his lifelong interest in nature with hands-on stewardship to monitor the bluebird nest box trail at F.V. Kent

Park. He is now entering his 11th season of supporting this vital conservation effort. Although his professional career was with a government contractor before retiring in 2023, Ben has long valued opportunities to connect with the natural world. He also serves on the board of Iowa Master Naturalists, where he enjoys learning, sharing, and building connections with others who care deeply about conservation. 🌿



Kasey Hutchinson

FEBRUARY 8, 2026 CREATING A POLLINATOR MICROPRAIRIE IN YOUR LANDSCAPE

Kasey Hutchinson, Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability. Since 2018, Kasey Hutchinson has served as Johnson County's Environmental Regulations Coordinator, ensuring that developments in unincorporated areas

We hope to see you at the 2026 Project GREEN Winter Garden Forums!

Linda Schreiber
Winter Garden Forums and Communications Chair

Site Improvements at Project GREEN Gardens at the Ashton House

Exciting Updates for a Greener Tomorrow

By Laura Hawks

Project GREEN Gardens at the Ashton House are undergoing a series of thoughtful site improvements designed to enhance both users' experiences and the beauty and sustainability of our beloved community space. From expanded garden beds to newly installed walkways and soft-surface trail spurs, these updates aim to create an even more welcoming environment for volunteers, residents, and visitors alike.



Construction underway for the new fire pit and low seat wall.

Volunteers and staff have been hard at work controlling invasive species and planting native plants that will attract pollinators and support local ecosystems. In addition, comfortable additions for relaxation, gatherings, and volunteer activities will be provided by new benches, a fire pit with a low seat wall, a watering system for use by volunteers, an accessible lighted walkway, interpretive signage, an ADA accessible drinking fountain (for humans and pets), a bicycle fix-it station and a bike parking area, and shaded



A new path from Normandy Drive and a stone pillar will soon be ready to welcome guests to the Project GREEN Gardens.



Artist's rendering of east park entry off Normandy Drive.

areas. These efforts reflect our commitment to both environmental stewardship and community engagement.

We invite everyone to visit Project GREEN Gardens at the Ashton House and experience the transformation firsthand. The site improvements have been possible through a State of Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Grant and through Project GREEN's active leadership in defining the project scope and in securing this grant.

Project GREEN co-presidents Cindy Parsons and Diane Allen hired a local landscape architect, Laura Hawks of Hawks Design, to work with the City of Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department to prepare the grant application. The State of Iowa awarded the funding (\$200,000) to the City of Iowa City in 2023. Hawks Design submitted a proposal to Iowa City to provide landscape architectural services and was chosen by the city to provide these services. Laura Hawks worked closely with Parks and Recreation in the development of the site-improvements plan documents. Subconsultant Bob Gassman of Neuman Monson prepared the design and construction documents for a custom-designed bird blind to be located in the southern part of the site. The project should be completed by the end of 2025.

Stay tuned for upcoming events and opportunities to get involved in making our gardens a vibrant hub for connection and growth. 🌿

Welcome to Project GREEN Gardens

By Susan Terveer-Mullins

Every visit to the Project GREEN Gardens at the Ashton House in Iowa City begins with a moment of beauty. As you turn into the parking area, you are greeted by the Welcome Garden, which sets the tone for all that awaits you in our 8-acre park. More than a landscape feature, the Welcome Garden is a living invitation and a reminder that nature and community work together here.



Colorful plantings in the Welcome Garden bed provide vibrant and seasonal beauty.

The Welcome Garden bed has been designed to provide interest throughout the year. From the first blooms of spring to the colorful displays of autumn, visitors are met with a mix of plantings that highlight the richness of our Eastern Iowa growing season. Native perennials, a ginkgo tree, and shrubs anchor the space and provide structure, while seasonal annuals bring fresh bursts of color. Special attention has been given to pollinator-friendly species, ensuring that bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects find a home here.

This Welcome Garden reflects Project GREEN's broader mission: Grow to Reach Environmental Excellence Now. Volunteers aim to foster gardens where people can connect with one another and enjoy the natural world. Just as the Welcome Garden greets every guest, the entire garden is intended as a space for discovery, inspiration, play, and rest.

We encourage all who visit to take a moment when they arrive. Whether it's walking your dog, taking a hike or a bike ride, or stepping out of your car, let the Project GREEN Gardens offer a gentle transition from the busyness of Iowa City to the calm and beauty of nature. Slow down, breathe deeply, and enjoy all that the Project GREEN Garden has to share.

The Welcome Garden is our way of saying: enjoy your time here. 🌿

UI Student Volunteers

By Nick Goergen

My name is Nick Goergen, and I am an MFA candidate in the sculpture program of the University of Iowa. I have been volunteering with Project GREEN for two years. Before moving to Iowa, I had lived in Arizona my entire life, so I had much to learn about gardening in this new climate. I live up the road from the Ashton House and noticed on my walks the signs saying that the garden needed volunteers. I sent an email to the email address, and

the next week I showed up to garden!

My first day at the garden we planted canna lily bulbs that had been dormant over the winter. I learned quickly that the plants that gardeners use across different growing zones have a lot of overlap, but there are differences in plant life cycles and the time of year you plant. My grandmother never had to dig up her cannas in the Arizona winter, and lantana can stay in the ground year-round to form a large bush. Here, with Project GREEN, I learned to appreciate the beauty of the changing seasons.

Along with the other volunteers I've spent many hours weeding grasses, thistles, and lots of dandelions. I think my favorite sessions are the ones in May when we finally put annuals in the ground. My absolute favorite species are the various marigolds. There are truly few other flowers as jubilant and vivid as any species of marigold. I try not to pick favorites, but I have to confess that the "quilt bed" has a special place in my heart. This past year we ringed it with tangerine marigolds and put a checkerboard pattern of globe amaranth in the center!

When the flowers were in bloom and needed deadheading, I collected all of the chopped marigolds and took them back to my studio to prepare a vivid yellow dye that I use in my artwork. Waste not, want not!

This summer I took part in the Open Gardens Weekend as a volunteer, handing out flyers for the participating gardens, as well as telling people more about the Ashton House and the plans for construction following a REAP Grant award. 🌿



Volunteers like Nick help create beautiful flower beds like this one.

Northside Flowerbed

By Susan Ahrens

Gardening at an historic landmark property presents unique challenges as well as opportunities. The garden bed pictured, designated the Northside Garage Flowerbed, hides the original Ashton House sidewalk that curved around from the front of the driveway to the back patio. A new sidewalk was poured to provide handicap accessibility after the City of Iowa City purchased the property to use as a public event space. Because

Project GREEN Gardens at the Ashton House cont.

of the historic designation the old sidewalk could not be removed, so it was covered with soil and became a permanent part of the new garden. The challenge was determining what to plant over concrete with just a few inches of soil on top.



The Northside Garage Gardenbed succeeds in hiding buried historical challenges.

The original ostrich ferns remain and hug the house. The sidewalk border includes a variety of irises alternating with lamb's ear. Over the last two gardening seasons, I have been building a berm over the old sidewalk, using mulch and compost available from the city's Eastside Recycling Center. This added depth will accommodate annual plantings with smaller root systems and offer wider options when choosing plants. The accompanying picture shows lantana doing very well on the berm. Next year, I'll complete the planting project, using more purple fountain grass and iris on the corner along with 'Color Blaze' coleus, lavender Egyptian star flower (Pentas), tangerine marigolds, and a sprinkling of snapdragons and zinnias.

Gardening is an endeavor of trial and error, often confounded by weather (lack of rain!) and nature (deer and rabbits!). Plan to visit the Northside Garage Flowerbed during Project GREEN's Open Gardens Weekend on June 27-28, 2026. 🌿

A Volunteer's Thoughts

By Evelyn Frey

I have volunteered with Project GREEN at the Ashton House Gardens since 2020. It has been my pleasure to contribute to their development and maintenance.

One of Project GREEN's goals at Ashton House is to reclaim its overgrown planting beds. So, slowly, over the years we have cleared beds of creeping Charlie, Virginia creeper, poison ivy,



A harmonious mix of perennials and annuals greet visitors in Evelyn's Corner.

and several kinds of volunteer trees.

Three years ago, our fearless leader, Diane Allen, directed our energy to clearing part of the bed at the southwest corner of the parking lot, creating space for some of the canna bulbs left over from the previous year. This was the beginning of Evelyn's Corner, which has tripled in size and is still growing.

As we cleared, we discovered magnolias, dogwood, black-eyed Susan, hydrangea, ginger, and ajuga (which loves its sunny new lease on life). The milkweed and goldenrod are flourishing. Annuals add color as they fill in around the perennials and the boxwoods that Project GREEN has added.

Evelyn's Corner, a mixed bed of annuals, perennials, shrubs, and neatly trimmed trees, offers an opportunity to create and experiment with plants, ideas, and strategies. It is a joy to walk through the gardens and see the impact a handful of volunteers can make. 🌿

Visit our website www.projectgreen.org to find the PG Blog. It is a weekly summary featuring photos and a description of the work completed at the Project GREEN Gardens at Ashton House by our trusty group of volunteers, who work each Monday morning from 9 to 11 a.m., from May through October.

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\$350 BUSINESS SPONSORS FOR OPEN GARDENS WEEKEND
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in memory of Emilie Rubright
Sally Weyer
in memory of Joan Parsons
Pat and Betty White
Harold Williamson
Larry Wilson & Mary Matthew
to honor Laura Hawks
Shirley Wyrick

We are so grateful for our wonderful donors and volunteers. Your gifts make our beautification work possible. Project GREEN funds continue to be needed for our plantings of colorful annuals, tree maintenance and protection, and watering trees as needed - which this year was a large expense! Our funds also continue to provide Open Gardens Weekend garden tours and the Second Sunday Garden Forums to the public, all for free. Project GREEN is proud of all that we are able to accomplish each year, and we could not do it without your help!

Open Gardens Weekend 2025

By Beth Cody

Project GREEN's Open Gardens Weekend 2025 was a great success, held the weekend of June 28–29. The event featured more than 20 private gardens in Iowa City and Coralville, some never before open to the public.

Despite the heat, hundreds of garden lovers enthusiastically visited the wide variety of gardens shared by our generous garden hosts. Holding the event over two days allowed time for friendly chats between our knowledgeable garden hosts and numerous appreciative visitors.

Maps showing the participating gardens were available only at sponsor locations and at Ashton House during the event. Sponsor funding covers event costs and remaining funds support Project GREEN's community beautification projects. Eight Local Business Sponsors made the Open Gardens Weekend 2025 a free event for the public. We are grateful for the generosity of our 2025 Local Business Sponsors:

Forever Green, Inc.
Hills Bank and Trust
HyVee
Iowa City Landscaping
Lenoch & Cilek Ace Hardware
Pyramid Services Inc.
Sanders Creek Co.
Sustainable Landscape Solutions

The Open Gardens Weekend 2026 will be held the weekend of **June 27–28, 2026**. We would love to include your garden in our event, or if you see a beautiful garden please let us know the address and we'll contact the garden owner. We greatly appreciate your support and enthusiasm for the Open Gardens Weekend 2026! 🌿



Warren & Cindy Ness' Ralston Rapids Garden Railroad imaginatively employs live miniature trees and plants at scale.



A peaceful corner of Alan and Dottie Frank's lovely Asian-style garden.



Ed & Kelli Rinderspacher's West Branch property is filled with specimen conifers, huge to miniature.



Crowds thronged Dr. Rajagopal's flower-filled garden and wooded dell, which he generously shared with visitors.

The Little Free Library at Ashton House

By Mary Laughlin and Roger Swartz

The Little Free Library on the Ashton House grounds provides literary enjoyment to the Iowa City community. It is located near the Park Road–Rocky Shore Drive curve at the edge of the Triangle flower bed, close to the sidewalk and the hike-and-bike trail along the Iowa River. You may have seen it from the street as you drove or rode or walked by.

This Little Free Library closely resembles the Ashton House itself—it even includes the iconic “stone” turret. The library was built in 2022; its builder and steward, Roger Swartz, does annual maintenance on the paint, wood, etc.

The library has two book compartments and welcomes fiction, nonfiction, children's books, gardening books, cookbooks and CDs. Donations for the library are eagerly encouraged. They can be made by stopping by Ashton House on Mondays 9–11 AM, when Project GREEN gardeners are working (until approximately November 1), or by contacting Project GREEN volunteers Diane

Allen or Mary Laughlin.

Remember our garden tour slogan of a few years ago: “Gardeners read; readers garden.” Let's add—in this City of Literature, Project GREEN wants to ensure that everyone reads!



Project GREEN was able to buy a John Deere gator with money donated by Fern Allison, a long time Project GREEN volunteer. Fern has been an exceptional labor-saver this past 2025 season.

PROJECT GREEN

City Hall
410 E. Washington St.
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Return Service Requested



Project GREEN is a nonprofit organization that supports efforts to educate citizens about the importance of conservation practices and preserving the natural beauty of the environment. The organization celebrated fifty-seven years of service to the community in 2025!

CLIP AND SAVE

Second Sunday 2026 Winter Garden Forums

Presented by Project GREEN and the Iowa City Public Library
Meeting Room A - 2 to 4 p.m.
Free to the public.

*Sunday, January 11, 2026: Jason Taylor with "Bur Oak Land Trust: Strategies in Environmental Conservation."

*Sunday, February 8, 2026: Kasey Hutchinson and "Creating a Pollinator Microprairie in Your Landscape."

*Sunday, March 8, 2026: Ben Rowold and "Monitoring Kent Park Bluebirds."

Project GREEN Gardens at 820 Park Road
Each Monday from May 4 through October 26,
9 - 11 a.m.

All are welcome to volunteer! For more information contact Diane Allen or Cindy Parsons

Open Gardens Weekend 2026

June 27 (4 - 8 p.m.) and June 28 (10 a.m. - 2 p.m.), 2026

Check www.projectgreen.org for information

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Please contact us at iowacityprojectgreen@gmail.com to reach any of the above individuals and for address changes.

Be sure to check out our updated and easy-to-navigate website: www.projectgreen.org, and follow us on Facebook.