



Town Square: A demonstration garden is the new kid in town at Crane Park



Flowers grow in Crane Park Demonstration Garden. JOSE GERMAN/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

By JOSE GERMAN

Special to Montclair Local

Montclair has a reputation of as green town with the privilege of having great parks and wonderful open spaces. Montclair also has a group of well-known gardens that are part of the town culture and history, such as Presby Memorial Iris Garden, Van Vleck Garden, and the Avis Campbell Gardens, to name a few.

But there is a new kid in this garden league: the [Crane Park Demonstration Garden](#), located in Crane Park, formerly known as Lackawanna Plaza Park. This pocket park of a third of an acre has something unique to offer. As the only park in downtown Montclair, it has a special location. The triangular shape of the park includes six triangular blue stone raised beds. It has mature Sycamore trees that have probably been there for around a century. In the center, there is a modern sculpture. The park is located across the street from the original location of the Crane family house before it was moved to its current Orange Road location. In the past year, the six beds have been repurposed as a pollinator and bird garden, serving environmental and educational purposes.

What is a “demonstration garden?” Demonstration gardens utilize public spaces to illustrate approaches to gardening. In this case, we have created a pollinator and bird garden integrating edible plants to educate the community about the relationship between pollinators and food production. At the same time, it is an example of a sustainable, eco-friendly garden that visitors can replicate at home.

More than 400 native plants have been planted in the garden. These native plant species provide nectar and

host plants for pollinators and food for birds, plus shelter from weather and predators. These plants belong to this climate and so are low maintenance once they are established.

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A demonstration garden shows the community different approaches to gardening. JOSE GERMAN/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

The garden includes over 50 different species of plants native to the Northeast, including host plants for butterflies. Crane Park Demonstration Garden is a certified Monarch Butterfly Waystation. It has been also certified by the National Wildlife Federation and New Jersey Audubon Society as a wildlife habitat and has certification as a Pollinator Garden by The Xerxes Society.

It is a four-season garden designed to provide nectar and host plants for pollinators from spring to fall, berries and seeds for birds in all seasons, and year-round visual interest. Edible plants have been incorporated in the landscape design to provide additional interest.

The Demonstration Garden is part of the Environmental Initiative Program of the NEEC, a local non-profit organization that works at the community level to protect the environment and promote local sustainability and food security, and Montclair residents funded the project and organized the neighbors to create a group to continue the work at Crane Park in the long term. The garden was designed by myself, in collaboration with David Wasmuth, an environmentalist and wildlife habitat expert.

The **Friends of Crane Park** are an organization of neighborhood residents concerned with enhancing the appearance and use of this small jewel of a park. They have helped with the planting and maintenance of the demonstration garden to provide a beautiful, inviting space where visitors can see firsthand strategies for gardening in harmony with nature. In coordination with the NEEC, they will be offering gardening and environmental workshops as well as guided tours for visitors interested in learning about using native plants, creating pollinator gardens, gardening for birds, integrating food production into flower gardens, and developing backyard habitats.

Even with its small size, the park has risen from a largely overlooked park to become the most beautiful pocket park in Montclair. The collection of native plants, most of them endemic to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, is very extensive, making the garden a botanical treasure. Guided tours for groups are available upon request.

This garden is a community project with the support of the township, Mayor Robert L. Jackson, and council

members, with particular support from council members Dr. Renee Baskerville and Robert Russo, as well as the Director of Community Department, Steve Wood, Marcia Almeida, Member of Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, David Wasmuth from Friends of Crane Park, and garden leader.

All of these qualities are making Crane Park Demonstration Garden the new garden destination in Montclair.

Jose German is a New Jersey environmental activist, Essex County certified master gardener and Montclair resident. He is the founder of the Northeast Earth Coalition (neearth.org), a nonprofit environmental organization.