



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## 2025 GROWING TO GREEN HARVEST AWARDS CELEBRATION

COLUMBUS, OH — On Thursday, October 9, 2025, Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens hosted the **2025 Growing to Green Harvest Awards Celebration**, an inspiring evening that brought together gardeners, volunteers, and community partners from across Central Ohio to honor 25 years of the Growing to Green program. The milestone celebration recognized outstanding community gardens and individuals whose dedication continues to transform neighborhoods through gardening, education, and community building.

“This year is especially meaningful—it marks 25 years since the establishment of Growing to Green,” said Cindy Maravich, Community Outreach and Education Senior Manager. “Tonight, we celebrate not just our award winners, but the thousands of hands that have helped this program grow. Every garden, every volunteer, every seed planted has helped strengthen our community.” Over the past year, Growing to Green staff and volunteers supported **263 gardens**, presented or participated in **39 educational programs**, and reached thousands of residents through hands-on gardening initiatives.

Community gardens continue to make an impact. In 2025, **9,762 volunteers** contributed their time to grow more than **348,000 pounds of fresh produce**, with **over 161,000 pounds donated** to neighbors in need—a record-breaking year for community impact.

### Remembering Bill Dawson

This year’s celebration also honored the memory and legacy of **Bill Dawson**, a beloved educator, mentor, and leader of the community gardening movement in Central Ohio. Bill dedicated his career to empowering gardeners of all ages and backgrounds, serving as a driving force behind the expansion of urban agriculture and community throughout Columbus. His belief in the power of gardens to connect people and strengthen neighborhoods continues to inspire the work of Growing to Green today.

### Award Highlights

#### **Paul B. Redman Youth Leadership Award**

Sponsored by the Franklin Park Conservatory Women’s Board, this award recognizes a young gardener demonstrating leadership and community service. This year’s recipient, **Donte Robinson**, was honored for his leadership through **Kingdom Power Baptist Church**, where he coordinates meal distribution and youth gardening programs. Donte was unable to attend in person—he was on the football field representing Columbus South High School—but his dedication to gardening and community leadership shone brightly throughout the evening.



### **Bill Dawson Community Gardener of the Year Award**

This award honors a gardener whose dedication and leadership have strengthened the community gardening movement. **Susan Benedetti**, of **The Garden for All** in New Albany and Johnstown, received this year's honor. Through her leadership, The Garden for All has produced over **30,000 pounds of fresh produce** this year, all donated to local food pantries. Her mentorship and advocacy continue to inspire volunteers and expand access to healthy food across Central Ohio. In a heartwarming surprise, every award applicant will receive a **\$100 gift card**, made possible by donor **Bill Gerhardt** of **Greenscapes Landscape Company**, a longtime supporter of Growing to Green.

### **Celebrating 25 Years of Growth**

The ceremony also featured special remarks from **Priscilla Tyson**, former Columbus City Councilmember, food access advocate, and community leader. Tyson reflected on the role of community gardening in building stronger, more resilient neighborhoods. The evening continued with anniversary recognitions for gardens marking milestones from **5 to 35 years** of continuous operation. Each garden celebrating one of the five-year anniversaries, will receive a metal commemorative sign to place in their garden.

Highlights included:

- **5-Year Gardens** such as Havenwood International, Southside Family Farms, and The Flower Initiative.
- **10-Year Gardens** including Sunny Glen Garden, WARM Community Garden, and Berwick Alternative Community Garden.
- **15-Year Gardens** such as 4th Street Farms, Worthington Community Garden, and Red Roots Community Garden.
- **20-Year Gardens** including **St. Dominic** and the **Horticultural Therapy Garden at Chadwick Arboretum**, each receiving a **\$500 cash award** thanks to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation and the Bowden Family.
- **25-Year Garden: Schumacher Gardens**, recognized for its decades of connection, education, and neighborhood pride, received a commemorative shovel courtesy of Growing to Green, and a **\$1,000 cash award** thanks to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation and Bowden Family.
- **35-Year Garden: Old Towne East Gardens**, celebrated for more than three decades of growth and service.

Additional recognition was given to gardens that have been thriving for more than 25 years, including **Holy Rosary St. John Gardens (1999)**, **Gardens at Gantz Farm (1992)**, **Chadwick Arboretum (1980)**, and **Wallace Community Garden (1943)**—one of the oldest continuously operating gardens in the region.

As the evening concluded, **Growing to Green Manager Muluken Kebede** reflected on the program's 25-year journey: "Community gardening has never just been about growing food. It is about growing belonging, resilience, and hope. Together, we have built something truly extraordinary—a community that keeps showing up for one another, season after season."



Growing to Green's success is made possible by its dedicated partners and sponsors, including: **Greenscapes Landscape Company**, the **Franklin County Board of Commissioners**, **The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company**, **The Hinson Family Trust**, **The Osteopathic Heritage Foundation** (in cooperation with the **Bowden Family**), and the **Franklin Park Conservatory Women's Board**.

For more information, please visit [fpconservatory.org/growing-to-green](http://fpconservatory.org/growing-to-green), and follow the Conservatory on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

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*Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens offers world-class horticulture, art & nature-based exhibitions and educational programs. The 13-acre indoor and outdoor facility—situated two miles from downtown Columbus—features glasshouses including the historic John F. Wolfe Palm House; botanical gardens including the Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation Children's Garden and Scotts Miracle Gro-Foundation Community Garden Campus; and event venues. The Conservatory is home to the largest collection of Chihuly glass in a botanical garden and Light Raiment II by internationally renowned artist James Turrell. Committed to the community, the Conservatory strives to provide an accessible and welcoming experience to all.*