



Cornell University

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Monroe County

2449 Saint Paul Blvd
Rochester, NY 14617
p.585.753.2550 f.585.753.2560
monroe@cornell.edu
monroe.cce.cornell.edu

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For more information, contact:

Marci Muller
Horticulture Program Leader
585.753.2557
mem545@cornell.edu

Local Gardening Initiative Wins International Award

Blocks in Bloom was awarded the 2023 Innovative Projects Award at the International Master Gardener Conference in Overland Park, Kansas

Cornell Cooperative Extension Monroe County's (CCE Monroe) Master Gardener program was recognized for excellence during the 2023 International Master Gardener Conference for their innovative Blocks in Bloom program. The conference was hosted by the Kansas State University Extension Master Gardeners of Johnson County, held in Overland Park, Kansas, June 18 – 22, 2023.

The Blocks in Bloom program received *The David Gibby International Search for Excellence Award* in the category of Innovative Projects. The award was presented during the conference and was attended by over one thousand Extension Master Gardeners and Extension professionals from forty-four states, Canada and England. The Friends of Extension Foundation of CCE Monroe generously supported travel costs for Ashly Piedmont (MG Coordinator) and Kathy Lewis (MGV/BIB Coordinator) to accept this amazing award.

The David Gibby International Search for Excellence Awards, named in honor of the founder of the Extension Master Gardener program, recognize exemplary group projects that show significant learning by the Master Gardeners or the public. The award-winning projects showcase the efforts and talents of Master Gardener volunteers, often providing economic, environmental, educational, and health impacts. These innovative projects frequently serve as models, influencing the development of Extension Master Gardener-led programs worldwide.

Blocks in Bloom is a 10-year long effort created by Master Gardeners of CCE Monroe. Combining community-building efforts with front yard flower gardening, Blocks in Bloom works with blocks in lower-resourced neighborhoods in the City of Rochester. Run entirely with volunteers and donated materials, this initiative works with neighborhoods where one resident agrees to be the Block Captain and signs up at

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least 6 households on the block to participate. Two volunteer mentors work with each block throughout the season, planning gardens and teaching gardening basics. Area gardeners, clubs, and stores donate perennial plants for the gardens, and the City of Rochester offers compost, mulch and annual flowers.

"Participants strengthen community ties while beautifying their blocks," according to Kathy Lewis, Master Gardener with Cornell Cooperative Extension Monroe County.

"Magic happens when neighbors come together and work on gardening," says Block Captain Wendy White Sprague. *"I had lived on my block for over 20 years, and only waved at my neighbors. Now we are family!"*

Blocks in Bloom has served 96 blocks and over 950 households since its founding in 2014. For more information on how to participate or donate, visit <https://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/horticulture/blocks-in-bloom>.

Blocks in Bloom has also garnered several awards including:

- Community Greening Award from the Horticultural Society of America (2020)
- [Zone III Civic Improvement Commendation from the Garden Club of America](#) (2021)
- Environmental Innovation Award from the Seneca Park Zoo Society (2023)



(From left to right)

Dennis Patton, Extension Horticulture Agent Ornamentals & Extension Master Gardeners/Johnson County
K-State Research and Extension

Kathy Lewis, Cornell Cooperative Extension Monroe County Master Gardener Volunteer

Ashly Piedmont, Cornell Cooperative Extension Monroe County-Master Gardener Coordinator



*2023 David Gibby
Search for Excellence Award*

**First Place
Innovative Projects**

***Cornell Cooperative Extension – Monroe County
New York
Blocks in Bloom***

Sponsored by Extension Master Gardener National Committee
International Master Gardener Conference, Overland Park, Kansas

Hosted by the Kansas State University Extension Master Gardeners of Johnson County



Kathy Lewis, Master Gardener volunteer, founded the Blocks in Bloom program as a way to give back to the Rochester community.

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