



THIS ARTICLE IS PART OF OUR SERIES ABOUT HIGH KNOB, ONE OF THE MOST DIVERSE BIOSPHERES IN THE COUNTRY.

Educating Our Youth: The Norton Green Thumb Garden Club

Written by Jala Tyler

The Clinch Coalition would like to take a moment to shed a light on the wonderful strides being taken by other local organizations and clubs in the community. This past April, TCC assisted the Norton Green Thumb Garden Club with their Earth Day event. Outside of the community center on Park Avenue, several members of the community banded together to plant a pollinator garden. It was here that I had the privilege to meet the wonderful members of the local garden group. After being given a tour of the community center, I was then taken to Norton Elementary School, where I was surprised to see the small greenhouse that stood just beyond the back gate.



Inside of the small greenhouse there were a variety of plants being grown. It was intriguing to see all of the different names and signatures that were scribbled along the popsicle sticks gently anchored inside the pots. "Who's growing these?" I asked Debbie Mullins.



"The children here at the elementary school. We volunteer and help them learn about the importance of plants!" My interest peaked as I saw the passion and care that had gone into caring for the specimens. It was here that I knew it would be an amazing opportunity to interview the Garden Club. They have shown me not only the importance of caring for plants, but also of educating our youth. And what an amazing feat that is!

On May 9th, 2022, I had the privilege of sitting down with Norton Green Thumb Garden Club president, Sharon Taylor for a lighthearted interview. When asked how she came to be president, Taylor smiled to herself and remarked that it was a moment of chance.

"For most people that may come for a first time visit...they think [to themselves], 'I like plants, and I like growing stuff', yet they question their knowledge base. But no matter what experience level we all learn from each other, like anything else in life."

Taylor went on to say that while every member of the garden club has their preferences or habits when gardening, it's those differences that show them alternate perspectives that they can apply to their own. Not to mention the club focuses on a variety of activities that do not strictly relate to growing plants. Due to the varying ages of the members, Taylor divulged to me that they believe everyone can find a place in their organization.





Activities

What's New on High Knob?

June 6th-August 25th: Norton Summer Photo Contest

June 21st-23rd: Outdoor Adventure Camp

July 1st: Independence Day Celebration!

August 1st: Pre-registration for the High Knob Naturalist Rally begins!

Plant of the Month

Flame Azalea

Rhododendron calendulaceum

The beautiful southern Flame Azalea, *Rhododendron calendulaceum*, forms striking displays on some of the grassy balds of the southern Appalachians. A wide variation of color forms occurs, from all shades of yellow to orange-yellow and scarlet. The flowers appear before or with the new leaves. This species can be spotted often at eye level and from more than several feet away, given its vibrancy. Like most members of the heath family, it does best in acid soil.

R. calendulaceum has non-fragrant flowers and is often planted as an ornamental. It is native to the area and while in the past it has been medicinally used externally, rhododendron in general has properties that could be toxic if ingested. All parts of the flame azalea are poisonous to humans, so it's best to view this beauty from afar!



Fun Fact:
The poisonous toxin in rhododendron is known as grayanotoxin or rhodotoxin.

Make Sure to Pre-register for the High Knob Naturalist Rally!

Opening August 1st, 2022

The Clinch Coalition is excited to announce that this year's High Knob Naturalist Rally will be in person on **September 24th, 2022** from 10am-6pm. Pre-registration for the event will be opening on our website on August 1st for you to make your choice of hikes and view the schedule of events. Make sure to pre-register, and we will see you on **September 24th, 2022!**

If you would like to become a member or make a donation, please visit www.clinchcoalition.org.



"We're trying to think of ways to enforce to our older demographic that presence is important. We love for everyone to come and experience all activities." Those activities can range from planting gardens and recycling with the Virginia Federation for Garden Clubs, to participating in local events with education or tabling.

Taylor also made sure to assure me, a less experienced plant lover, that they encourage all levels to come and join their group. This assurance, in my opinion, is perfectly showcased in their work with local youth. I asked Taylor how we as organizations can try to get kids off their phones and outside in gardens.

"Well, it's certainly a dilemma to try to come up with good ways to appeal to that group," she pondered.

"If [education on nature and its importance] is not as prioritized in schools as it maybe once was, it should be something that children are taught from their parents and local groups such as ours. When we have events that focus on the environment, we could make more of an effort to educate in our publications. We can encourage buzz around these topics where parents will want to bring their children out to observe, learn, and experience." This thought circled our conversation back to the little greenhouse I had visited just two weeks prior. What impact does Taylor believe the greenhouse is having on the students? Has she noticed a positive outcome?

"The greenhouse is an excellent way for students to experience a hands-on way of learning. Debbie recently assisted the children with transplanting their plants to new pots and, while it was only for fifteen minutes, they were incredibly excited and passionate."

Suffice to say, after seeing the beauty of the greenhouse, I am inclined to agree.



If you would like to get involved with the Norton Green Thumb Garden Club, they have their meetings on the second Thursday of every month at the Norton Community Center. Please feel free to email Sharon Taylor at sharontaylor1217@gmail.com.



Sharon Taylor, President of NGTGC