

## The Chathams

## Garden club plants love of nature into action

BY JENNIFER DEWITT

MADISONCHATHAM THIS WEEK

What began as The Back Yard Garden Club at the home of Mrs. Earl Turner on October 28, 1952 has blossomed into the Town and Country Garden Club of both Chatham Township and Chatham Borough. You don't need to have a green thumb to be a part of this organization.

"We welcome everyone," said Peggy Wilson, president. "All you need to have is a love of gardening."

The Town and Country Garden Club has a long history of helping the community. When the Great Swamp was earmarked to become a jet port, the members went door to door talking to residents about its priceless value. They also raised money to buy a one half-acre of the land and give it to the Great Swamp Association.

"This is the history and legacy of the organization," said Wilson.

The twenty-seven current members originally focused solely on flower arranging. But this group of avid gardeners has widened their mission to include volunteering their services throughout the community.

"Our organization meets at The Little Red Brick Schoolhouse. We are responsible for the landscaping and window boxes," said Mary Keselica, Vice-President.

"We arrange flowers for the dining hall and lobby area of the Lyons Hospital," said Marjorie Heyer, recording secretary. "We also plant flowers at Colony Pool."

"We have planted different native plants at Raptor Trust, the bird rehabilitation center," said Gina Smith. "At Christmas time, we decorated the tree at the Library of the Chathams with all natural ornaments."

The Town and Country



COURTESY OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY GARDEN CLUB

Members of the Town and Country Garden Club of Chatham Township and Chatham Borough are, from left, Marjorie Heyer, Mary Keselica, Peggy Wilson and Gina Smith.

Garden club also educates the community on the various aspects of gardening.

"Our group teaches residents about native plants," Wilson said. "When someone plants a non-native plant to New Jersey, it crowds out the native plants and wildlife won't eat it. We talk to garden centers that sell these types of plants and try to encourage them to sell native plants that look similar."

The Department of Agriculture started the Master Gardener program to help assist people in the community with their gardening questions. Keselica has taken the necessary steps to become a Master Gardener and is a valuable resource to answer inquiries about horticultural therapy, plant diseases and pests.

"Because of my love of trees, flowers (especially Shasta Daisies) and grass, I

decided to volunteer to be a Tree Steward," Smith said. "I teach fourth graders in Union County about trees. Kids don't get enough time out in nature these days. It's important that they connect with nature."

These women not only enjoy the camaraderie among the group but also like knowing that they are doing something good for the environment.

"This is an ideal way to meet new people now that my kids are grown," Smith, who works part-time for Wildbirds Unlimited, said. "It is a way to stay in touch with my community."

"You can always learn something new from the group," Heyer said. "It's a great way to exchange ideas on pruning, planting and arranging."

"We are an eclectic group of all different ages and backgrounds," Wilson said. "But the one thing that we all have

in common is a love of nature."

They all feel that volunteering is a very important aspect to have in one's life and encourage others to volunteer.

Heyer whose favorite flowers include tulips and irises said, "Find something that you enjoy doing and volunteer. It's a wonderful way to meet others that share your interest."

"Talk to your friends and tag along where they volunteer," Keselica said. "Friends brought me along to help with the walled garden at Cross Estate and I enjoyed the weekly gardening so much, that now I'm the Secretary of the Board."

"Being in the garden is wonderful therapy," Smith said. "Plant a flower and see the joy."

For more information on the Town and Country Garden Club, contact Peggy Wilson at (973) 701-0183 or Mary Keselica at (973) 635-7379.