

“Growing a Garden Club One Project at a Time”
by Kim Halyak

One tiny idea leads to another, and before you know it, a flourishing garden club grows in Cooper Young.

The Cooper Young Garden Club started last January as just a way to bring fellow plant lovers together. The first year was all about developing friendships, sharing gardening tips, swapping plants, and hosting a members' progressive garden tour.

The initial meeting had 11 members, but has now grown to 25, including members from other neighborhoods. Our group includes men and women of all ages and gardening experience, and is open to anyone who loves plants. Members meet the 3rd Wed of the month, starting at 6pm with a potluck and socializing before commencing with garden topics.

Last month, we elected officers, created bylaws and a charter, added dues, and became a 501C3 under the umbrella of our Cooper Young Community Association. Our main goal this year is to pour our talents and love of plants back into Cooper Young through some major beautification projects.

Our first project was the removal of all tree grates around our Ginkgo trees lining Cooper Avenue because they were restricting the trees growth. Members of our club spent several Saturdays, weeding, composting, and mulching the 31 trees. Future plans include turning the tree grates into unique vertical gardens at key locations around the neighborhood and replacing the mulch with a more permanent, easy maintenance pea gravel.

Energized as a group, we started our second project, by researching how to create a neighborhood arboretum. This was inspired by the Central Gardens Arboretum, which has attained level 3 status, with over 90 different tree types. To keep from reinventing the wheel, I met with Lila Beth Burke, Central Gardens Committee Chair, who graciously shared her time and suggestions on the best way to tackle such a challenging project. Afterwards, four members of our club took the tree id classes taught by the Urban Forestry Association. Happily, Christine Conley, Judi Shellabarger, Emily Bishop, and I passed our tree test. Although we spent several afternoons identifying key trees in our neighborhood, the team lost steam with the scope of the project. Recently though, Wes Hopper, tree arborist, along with Jeff Golightly, and Jim Gafford came to our rescue, helping us identify about 36 different tree species in Cooper Young. Our goal is to achieve level 1 status (30 different identified and labeled trees) by creating a tree loop that passes by both Peabody Elementary and The Natural Learning School. This will make a wonderful learning opportunity for teachers and students, as well as walkers in the neighborhood. Over time, we hope to enlarge the walking loop to take in more blocks. Our expected completion is October 2016.

An important goal of our garden club is to make our neighborhood more inviting to residents and visitors alike. First impressions matter, especially at our neighborhood gateways. Because Cooper Young is synonymous with the Trestle Art and our much loved, red, “I love Memphis” mural near the Cooper Central entrance, we decided our other main entrances deserved the same pizazz and memorable art

work. That's why the Cooper Young Garden Club applied for the ioby "Green Up Memphis" fundraiser. We received a \$1750 matching grant to beautify our Cooper/Southern and Young/E. Parkway gateways by softening the commercial businesses at each corner. We plan to put unique plant filled containers and eye catching signage announcing entrance into our hip, vibrant, people friendly neighborhood. After funding is reached, time will be spent designing site specific planters, since each corner is small. Look for the finished project this fall.

Our most ambitious project will culminate May 21, 2016, from 10am-4pm, when the Cooper Young Garden Club hosts its first "Cooper Young Garden Walk 2016". What makes our walk so unique compared to other garden walks in Memphis is its size and location. While most suburban garden walks highlight 6-10 gardens, we decided to go big and focus on 20 private gardens along with several green businesses. Cooper Young revels in gardens with personality. The limitations of small, urban gardens become the upsides of quaint, quirky, and creative gardens that fully utilize space and purpose. There are gardens with chickens, raised beds, funky art, secluded patios, fountains, outdoor showers, ponds, fruit trees, permaculture, and so much more. Visitors will discover creative solutions to deal with shade, pets, tiny spaces, and privacy issues.

The Cooper Young Garden Walk will be a fun filled day long event. While the 20+ private/business garden tours begin at 10am, visitors should arrive early to visit the Tsunami and First Congo Farmers' Markets before stopping for breakfast at Stone Soup Cafe. Walk half a block to the gazebo to pick up the garden walk brochure/map. From there, stop at Jay Etkin Gallery at 10am to hear "Carol Reese", our Keynote speaker talk on "Adding Magical Design Elements to a Garden", before visiting the gardens on both sides of Cooper. Throughout the day, visitors will have time to visit "Ask-A-Master-Gardener" booth, the "Urban Forestry" booth, and various garden vendors and neighborhood boutiques. Additionally, Stephanie Jones and her staff will do outside demonstrations on paint finishes. With the gardens and business district in easy walking distance, visitors can quickly stop for lunch or beverages before resuming their tours. Many businesses will be offering discounts the day of the walk.

Be sure to buy your Garden Walk tickets before May 21, to enter your name in a drawing for a gift basket of gift certificates valued at over \$200. Early bird tickets are only \$10 and can be ordered online at <http://cooperyoung.org/2016/03/purchase-tickets-for-the-first-cooper-young-garden-walk-here/> or in person at CYCA or Stone Soup Cafe. Day of walk tickets are \$15 and will be sold at Stone Soup and the Cooper Young Gazebo.

"If you love our festival, you'll love our Garden Walk".

All the money raised will go back into our neighborhood future beautification projects. Anyone wishing to sponsor a garden, buy an ad in our garden brochure, volunteer as a docent, or provide services should contact kim halyak at kim_halyak@me.com

Our Garden Club is thankful for the tremendous help the Central Gardens Home + Garden Tour Chair, Kathy Ferguson, provided in talking us through the steps needed to start our garden walk. We appreciate the community spirit and helpful advice. and are happy to support their efforts this upcoming September, for their home and garden tour.

