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Fairfield Garden Club Members Sherry Rago, Ann Franzen, and Alisa Ryan

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HOME SWEET HOME
A FLOWER SHOW ROOTED IN NATURE

By Stephanie Kodweis, member of The Fairfield Garden Club • Photography by Dariusz Terepka



The Fairfield Garden Club members Stephanie Kodweis, Alisa Ryan, Katie Morrell, Sherry Rago, and Ann Franzen at Colonial Gardens in Fairfield.

For 110 years, The Fairfield Garden Club has been serving the educational and conservational interests of Fairfield, Connecticut. The roots of the Club's tradition of civic beautification and environmental stewardship began not in its gardens, but with bird conservation efforts. In 1896, nearly two decades before founding The Fairfield Garden Club, writer and conservationist Mabel Osgood Wright helped organize one of the nation's first bird-protection societies in response to overzealous hunting and the fashion industry's use of bird feathers, particularly large plumes to embellish hats. Her leadership established Fairfield as an early center of Audubon ideals and environmental advocacy.

Wright's conservation philosophy took lasting form in 1914 with the founding of Fairfield's Birdcraft Sanctuary, the first private bird refuge in the United States. A living embodiment of habitat protection, Birdcraft reflected Wright's belief that education, beauty, and conservation were inseparable and became a national model for wildlife preservation.

A year later, that same ethos inspired the founding of The Fairfield Garden Club. On December 1st, 1915, 25 women gathered to form an organization devoted to the "pleasure and profit of amateur gardeners," encouraging the exchange of ideas and the proper care of flowers and vegetable gardens. Mabel Osgood Wright was elected the Club's first president. Annual dues were set at 50 cents, and by the end of the first year, membership had grown to 100, reflecting the immediate embrace of the Club's mission.

Over the ensuing decades—and into the 21st century—the Club expanded its focus to include public education, historic garden restoration, town-wide bulb plantings, pollinator protection, and the reintroduction of the American Chestnut tree. Today,

The Fairfield Garden Club is an extension of the vision articulated in 1896, committed to stewarding the natural world through protection, planting, and community engagement.

From its earliest years, The Fairfield Garden Club's endeavors extended beyond private gardens. By the early 1920s, the Club had joined the Garden Club of America and embraced civic responsibility as a core value. Early initiatives included protecting wildflowers, addressing visual blight by opposing the proliferation of roadside advertising billboards, and planting at the train station and Town Hall.

The late 1920s and early 1930s marked a momentous period of civic planting. Hundreds of flowering trees were placed throughout Fairfield at schools, churches, libraries, cemeteries, and municipal buildings. The Club supported elm-care programs, debris cleanup along the Post Road, and expert consultation to preserve the town's historic tree canopy—efforts that permanently shaped our town's landscape.

Since 1935, the Club's longest continuous civic project has been the stewardship of Ogden House on Bronson Road. In 2013, in response to the Honeybee Colony Collapse Disorder, the Club established an apiary on the adjoining Oak Lawn property in partnership with Oak Lawn and the Fairfield Museum and History Center. The Club continues to collaborate with the Town of Fairfield on conservation initiatives, including the installation last summer of a riparian buffer at Brown's Brook.

The Club also hosts flower-arranging workshops for residents of Maplewood Senior Living, Mozaic Senior Life, and Sturges Ridge. Through its annual Spreading Cheer, Sharing Joy event, the Club continues its tradition of honoring local civic organizations, first responders, and others who serve the community by creating and delivering holiday wreaths and arrangements. In 2020, Kids Club was established to enable members' children to participate regularly in garden-themed programs, beach cleanups, crafts, and workshops.

As The Fairfield Garden Club embraces "back-to-nature" activities today, it follows in the footsteps of its founder. The Club's upcoming Spring Flower Show, Home Sweet Home, reflects Mabel Osgood Wright's enduring legacy. Co-chaired by Patty Carpenter, Ann Franzen, and Alisa Ryan, the Flower Show offers an opportunity to share with the community what the Club does best: beautify, conserve, and educate. Thanks to the generosity of its sponsors, the show is the Club's largest fundraiser in more than a decade and is essential to supporting the Club's volunteer-driven efforts. The free, two-day exhibition will be open to the public at the Fairfield University Bookstore (2nd floor) on May 1st (10 am – 3 pm) and May 2nd (10 am – 2 pm). GCA members from around the region (and country) will compete in Floral Design, Horticulture, Photography, Botanical Arts, and Needle Arts, and will be judged by GCA-approved judges from all over the U.S. Awards will be given in each division, from first-place blue ribbons to white-ribboned honorable mentions.



Founder of The Fairfield Garden Club, Mabel Osgood Wright

Mabel Osgood Wright is honored in the Home Sweet Home Flower Show Schedule with her timely quotes from The Friendship of Nature: A New England Chronicle of Birds and Flowers, originally published in 1894. Her words, rooted in a deep appreciation for the natural world, remind us to slow down and cherish the beauty around us. An exhibit







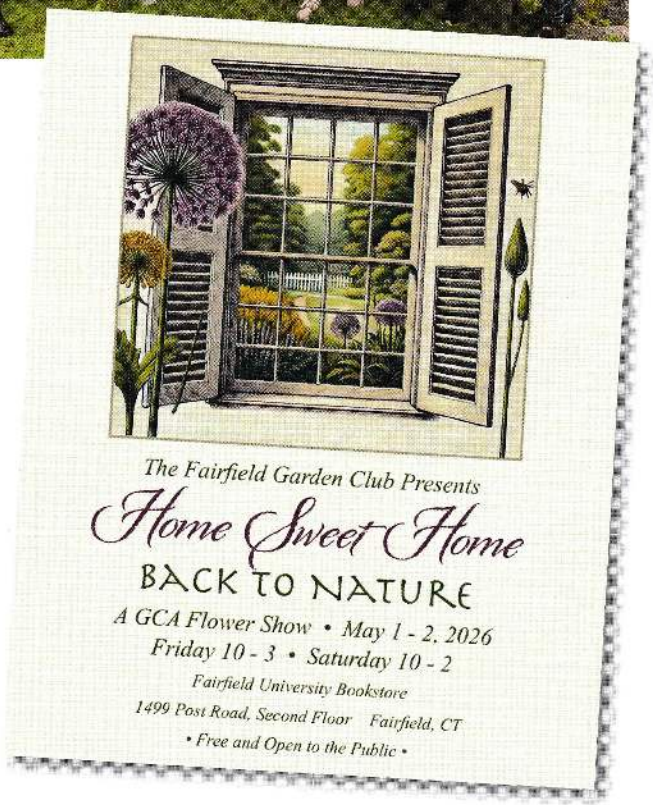
of Wright's photos will be featured concurrently at the Connecticut Audubon Birdcraft Museum this spring.

Looking ahead, "The Fairfield Garden Club will continue working to protect our natural resources and to encourage conservation and civic improvements through educational programs and community interaction," says Club President Sherry Rago. "The Club remains committed to civic works that benefit and enhance our town and to the protection of its natural resources," she adds. As the organization moves forward, it remains dedicated to adapting and responding to change with purpose and vision, continuing the ideals that have guided The Fairfield Garden Club since its founding.

The community is encouraged to explore and enjoy The Fairfield Garden Club's many public projects, including town-wide daffodil plantings, American chestnut trees, the colonial garden and grounds at Ogden House, the Ogden/Oak Lawn apiary, collaborations with Audubon, and conservation-themed documentary screenings.

For more information on The Fairfield Garden Club, please visit www.thefairfieldgardenclub.org. Don't forget to visit the free "Home Sweet Home: Back to Nature" exhibit on the 2nd floor of the Fairfield University Bookstore on May 1st and 2nd!

Special thanks to Colonial Gardens for hosting our lovely photo session.



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