

# NATIONAL GARDEN CLUBS, INC.



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## PRESS RELEASE

### CONTACT

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**N.J. nonprofit startup receives prestigious award for its successes teaching gardening to YMCA campers. Mr. Bob's Garden Foundation for YMCA Campers receives the Award of Excellence from National Garden Clubs, Inc.**

The members of National Garden Clubs, Inc. (NGC) recently honored Mr. Bob's Garden Foundation for YMCA Campers with their prestigious Award of Excellence, the highest award presented by NGC to a non-member. The Award of Excellence honors an individual, organization, or institution that has made significant contributions toward the advancement of the goals and purposes of National Garden Clubs, Inc.

Master Gardener and Certified Square Foot Garden Instructor Bob Markey started Mr. Bob's Garden Foundation for YMCA Campers in 2008 when he launched his **YMCA Square Foot Gardening Summer Camp** initiative at the Gateway YMCA in Rahway, New Jersey. In 2019, the program was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization and registered as **Mr. Bob's Garden Foundation for YMCA Campers**.

Square Foot Gardening is simple, easy to learn for all ages, and does not require lots of space or heavy tools. It involves the assemblage of an above-ground 3' x 3' box, a special organic soil mix, and a grid of nine squares and it is ready to plant. It is possible to grow nine different crops in that small space. Sixteen radishes fit in a square, nine bush beans fit in a square but only one tomato plant. Ultimately, Markey became known to the campers as "Mr. Bob the Gardener".

The Square Foot Garden Summer Camp Program supports the YMCA's Core Values of Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility. Along with learning the basics of Square Foot Gardening, the campers develop a deeper relationship with nature, a greater appreciation for the food they grow, and an expanded sense of community. The program's mission connects kids

with nature by empowering them to grow, harvest, taste, and market the organic fruits and vegetables of their labor.

The Square Foot Garden concept originated in 1976, when civil engineer Mel Bartholomew set out to solve world hunger one square foot at a time. He called his revolutionary approach to growing plants of all kinds called **Square Foot Gardening**. In 1981 his book, “**Square Foot Gardening**,” became the largest selling gardening book of all time. That is when Markey, traveled to Eden, Utah, in 2008, to meet the author and where he became a Square Foot Gardening Instructor to teach the method to kids.

**Since 2009, The Great Zucchini Race is the foundation’s** signature special event. The campers harvest zucchini squash, break into teams, and with bamboo skewers as axles they decorate their zucchini “racecars” with veggies. Add a 6-foot-tall wooden racetrack and it’s “game on!” You can see the race on YouTube – search **Great Zucchini Race!**

Mel Bartholomew has said, “Mr. Bob's Square Foot Gardening for Kids has done an excellent job of bringing a summer program that will give a lifetime of memories for all of the children associated with the Y and all of their programs”.

National Garden Clubs, Inc. currently has over 5000 local clubs, with 145,000 members, and over 330 international affiliate clubs. The organization provides education, resources, and national networking opportunities for its members to promote the love of gardening, floral design, civic, and environmental responsibility. **Learn more about National Garden Clubs, Inc. at <http://gardenclub.org>**

**Bob Markey’s picture is located at: <https://www.gardenclub.org/2023-award-excellence>.**

Sincerely,

Donna Marie

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