

NATIONAL GARDEN CLUBS, INC.



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PRESS RELEASE

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania High School Environmentalist teacher receives prestigious award. Abbey Nilson receives the Award of Excellence from National Garden Clubs, Inc.

The members of National Garden Clubs, Inc. (NGC) recently honored Shaler High School Sustainability teacher, Abbey Nilson, 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.

Nilson has been teaching science at Shaler Area High School, just outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for 15 years. In 2020, she began teaching a sustainability class, in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh. The curriculum is designed to encourage students to examine the impact of their own water and energy use, transportation, and food choices. They also study the effect of trash recycling and waste disposal. The program encourages the students to work with community leaders on environmentally-themed projects.

Nilson is passionate about engaging her students in projects to help make their community a more clean, green, and kind place to live. The most impressive program was working with the Allegheny Land Trust, a nonprofit dedicated to saving local land in Pennsylvania's Allegheny County. Their city has a history of severe flooding events. Nilson motivated her students to take part in a grassroots campaign to promote awareness and help purchase and preserve a 155-acre tract of land known as Girty's Woods - named for the watershed in which it is located. The area was targeted for development without regard to its critical role in stormwater absorption and thus flood prevention for the densely populated borough that sits in the basin below. The Allegheny Land Trust purchased the area in 2021 and it is now preserved as a vital green space. A second partnership with the Allegheny Land Trust helped to preserve the natural beauty of a former 60-acre tract of farmland, expand natural habitats, and increase native wildlife and native plants.

Nilson's students raised over \$30,000 to protect over 200 acres of green space. They even turned their classroom into a nursery for baby trees which they grew from seeds for their "plant a tree" project. They made and sold packets of native pollinator seeds and propagated and sold succulent plants. Their projects also involved a "green" renovation of a community building, an eco-friendly playground, and a Native Species Project in Girty's Woods. They made an eco-brick bench out of repurposed plastic. Currently, Nilson's students are writing an environmentally-themed children's book to sell as a fundraiser for a community effort to establish a library.

In 2023, Nilson received a Silver Seal Award from the Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania and was a finalist for the State of Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year award.

Nilson's ability to motivate students to look at their environmental impact and the importance of green space preservation is impressive. The students in Nilson's sustainability classes are the generation to come. They are learning valuable lessons on the importance of preserving our natural resources, skills in cooperation, organization, and communication plus how to put ideas into action.

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>**

Abbey Nilson's picture is located at: <https://www.gardenclub.org/2023-award-excellence>.

Sincerely,

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