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Spending an afternoon in the garden at Rancocas Nature Center

By Melissa Hanejko, correspondent

How does your garden grow?

At the Rancocas Nature Center, the gardens grow lush and beautiful, among the 210 wooded acres of the Rancocas State Park in Westampton.

At the nature center, gardens serve as more than just a pretty picture. Here you will find gardens designed to attract pollinators, as well as those to keep out pests. Other gardens in the center are home to dragonflies and butterflies, whose colorful presence can overshadow the brightest of blooms.

On Sunday afternoon, discover all of the fabulous and functional gardens of the Rancocas Nature Center at the fourth annual Garden Day Open House. From noon to 4 p.m., the grounds of the center will be open for exploration.

Tour the wildlife pollinator garden, native plant enclosures, and butterfly gardens and learn how form and function are used in the gardens' designs. Meander into the meadows where honeybees and pollinators are known to buzz about. When you reach the pond, keep an eye out for a flash of color in the sky, as dragonflies touch down for a cool drink.

After exploring on your own make sure to head back for the guided tours and demonstrations offered by the center's nature guides. Discover what kind of edibles are growing in the gardens

on the foraged food hike, and watch how flax is spun into linen fibers. Educational demonstrations will also be offered, so guests can learn how to put their green thumbs to use at home.

One of the center's newest, as well as oldest, attractions is the Historical Garden. This special garden was planted to memorialize the contributions of the area's first settlers and founders. The history dates to the 1600s, when the Lenni Lenape resided along the shores of the Rancocas Creek. Later years saw the arrival of the Quakers, who implemented their new farming techniques on the often inhospitable land. Finally, a community of former slaves and free African-Americans settled in the village of Timbuctoo, on the northern end of the Rancocas.

These three groups are commemorated by the Historical Garden, which has replicated the crops that were planted by each group. The Historical Garden features beans, squash, corn, lettuces, okra, and sweet potatoes.

The event will also host special children's activities, refreshments and raffles. There is no charge for admission, though donations to the center are appreciated. For more information, visit rancocasnaturecenter.org.