

The 'Really Crazy Gardeners' Behind One of Pleasantville's Favorite Annual Traditions

📅 May 8, 2026 👤 Adam Stone

Opinion

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By Adam Stone

When I reached Carolyn Ramsey by phone Thursday afternoon for an interview, she was (not surprisingly) surrounded by plants.

Ramsey and a trio of other Pleasantville Garden Club devotees were at a supplier's greenhouse in New Windsor, preparing for tomorrow's annual plant sale at Memorial Plaza.

Ramsey was joined by fellow Garden Club members Josephine Di Costanzo and Erica Babad, along with "honorary member" Dominique Nguyen-Ngoc, as the group sorted through various options for the Saturday sale.

"We are committed to having a really nice assortment so people can see things they haven't seen before," Ramsey told me.

The club works with half a dozen suppliers in total, from Hartsdale to Chester and beyond. Some plants arrive through online bare-root orders from states as far away as California. Unlike the fully grown plants shoppers usually see at nurseries, bare-root plants often arrive looking like little more than "a stick with roots," Ramsey explained.



From left, Carolyn Ramsey's son Dante, her brother Norman, daughter Aria and her at the Pleasantville Garden Club's plant sale last May.

Others are grown by club members themselves.

“One person has a greenhouse, and I have a setup with five racks of grow lights,” Ramsey said with a laugh. “Kind of really crazy gardeners, I have to say.”

The approach Ramsey and her fellow Garden Club members bring to the event also serves as a reminder of the kind of spirit that keeps many local traditions going and gives the community much of its character, from the **Pleasantville Music Festival** to the **Pleasantville Farmers Market** and much more.

None of it happens by itself.

‘HIGH LEVEL OF FRIENDLINESS’

The Pleasantville Garden Club’s annual sale has become one of those local traditions, held on Mother’s Day weekend each year. The club has been beautifying Pleasantville and surrounding areas since 1975, **celebrating its 50th anniversary** last year.

As a last-minute Mother’s Day shopper myself, I stopped by the sale last year and quickly learned the volunteers are patient with people who know next to nothing about gardening. It also turned out to be a pretty solid way to earn brownie points at home.



Photographed here are core members of the Pleasantville Garden Club. The group has approximately doubled in size over the past 16 years, growing from about 60 or 70 members to roughly 120 today.

Shoppers show up early to the sale (many start arriving by 7:30 a.m. for the 8 a.m. opening) looking for unusual perennials, native plants and the “glorious hanging baskets,” Ramsey said.

This year, the sale will feature more than 10,000 plants, including vegetables, herbs, annuals and perennials. There will also be a new setup at the north end of the train station.

But talking with Ramsey, it quickly became clear the sale is only part of the story.

The club itself has nearly doubled in size over the last 16 years, growing from roughly 60 or 70 members to about 120 today.

Ramsey believes part of that growth came after and as a result of Covid, when more people found themselves eager to spend time outdoors and reconnect with nature.

But she also thinks the club's culture plays a major role.

"It's a high level of friendliness," she said. "Everybody is welcome, all walks of life."

Then she paused before adding another detail she clearly enjoys.

"This is going to make you laugh," Ramsey said, "but all the members seem to be somehow really good cooks."

The club's monthly meetings at the Pleasantville Presbyterian Church are held the first Thursday of the month from October through May and feature guest speakers on gardening topics, trips to places like Untermyer Gardens in Yonkers and botanical gardens, and what Ramsey described as impressive spreads during coffee hour.

"We have amazing homemade treats," she said.

'TIME OUTSIDE'

The club also maintains roughly 25 public gardens throughout Mount Pleasant and runs educational programs for adults and children.

One recent workshop focused on winter sowing, a method of growing seeds outdoors that mimics natural conditions.

Saturday's plant sale is the organization's only fundraiser of the year, Ramsey said, with proceeds going back into those beautification and educational efforts.



Pleasantville Garden Club members assist shoppers during last year's plant sale.

"We hope to sell 8,000 to 10,000 plants," she noted.

Ramsey herself traces her love of gardening back to childhood. She grew up outside Binghamton, where her father was a master gardener.

"I'm sure I was out in the garden with him from the time I could walk," she said.

In fact, Ramsey ultimately brought that same love of the natural world to her family in motherhood. Shortly after moving into their Pleasantville home, she brought her twins, Aria and Dante, outside to pick cherry tomatoes when they were not quite two years old.

Aria picked one and ate it immediately. Dante looked at his tomato, declared it a "ball," and threw it across the yard. His sister then ran after it and ate that one too.

Ramsey chuckled, recalling that "there were tears because his ball disappeared."

The twins are freshmen now at Pleasantville High School and both are involved in Science Olympiad. Aria is especially interested in ecology and forestry.

"So I think, you know, the time outside has made a difference for her," Ramsey said.

As it can for all of us.

For more information about the Pleasantville Garden Club, visit its website, at www.pleasantvillegardenclub.org/home.



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Adam has worked in the local news industry for the past two decades in Westchester County and the broader Hudson Valley. [Read more from Adam's author bio here.](#)