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Seed Your Future's Contest Shows Children the Power of Plants

[Seed Your Future's](#) fifth annual plant drawing contest captured the imaginations of a record 6,050 children — a 36% increase from 2021 — opening their eyes to the possibilities of plants and a potential career path.

[Seed Your Future and Scholastic's Plant Mash-Up](#) contest encourages middle schoolers nationwide to consider the characteristics of two existing plants to create a plant mash-up with new qualities that could help their community.

The Plant Mash-Up is more than a contest for a monetary prize; it offers children three ways to tackle larger societal problems that don't have clear or easy answers, says Jazmin Albarran, executive director of Seed Your Future, the Society of American Florists' partner to help build the floriculture and horticulture labor pipeline.

"One, it allows them to express their own creativity and show that they have the potential to be a problem solver," she says. "Two, that they can then impact their community, their backyards, their families, their school, their environment. Three, they can do it through plants.

"That's the whole thing. We want to get young people excited about coming into careers working with flowers and plants, and what better [way to do that] than using plants to solve issues in their own community."

This year's [first place winner](#) is Chloe Grace N., an eighth-grader from New Castle, Indiana. She combined an aloe vera plant and a burgundy rubber tree to address air pollution and promote wound healing. "The leaves of the hybrid tree are aloe leaves, which produce useful

antioxidants for improved health, and have powerful health remedies that accelerate wound healing, as well as fighting off dangerous bacteria,” she wrote in her entry.

This year’s [runner-up](#) is Anna K., an eighth-grader from Shawnee, Kansas. She combined a silver maple and a breadfruit tree to address the problem of food deserts and malnutrition. “If these two could be combined, low-income citizens could have access to nutritious food from a tree that grows everywhere in the U.S. already,” she wrote in her entry.

This year’s [sweepstake winner](#) is Itais E., a sixth-grader from New Albany, Ohio, who combined a snake plant with an areca palm to address air pollution.

As Albarran reviewed the entries, she noticed mature themes mental health, shelter, erosion, air pollution, climate change, hydration, world hunger and diseases such as malaria.

“It was incredible to see the different topics that this contest can touch,” she says.

This contest is designed to get children thinking about plants at a critical age that could have a lifelong impact. Seed Your Future’s research has found that middle school is when children are starting to think about what they want to do when they grow up. In many states, middle schoolers are deciding what high school they want to attend based on their interests, such as a performing arts school.

“You can play a part in reaching young people and reaching the next generation of professionals simply by putting this contest in front of as many middle schoolers in your area as possible,” she says. “I want to see 50,000 kids participating in this event next year.”

The Plant Mash-Up is but one way to introduce children to a possible career in flowers and plants, and there are plenty of other ways to get them involved the rest of the year. For example, a florist could invite a local Boy Scout Troop or Girl Scout Troop for a field visit, Albarran says. The florist could then use resources from Seed Your Future or come up with a hands-on activity for the children, such as arranging a bouquet for their moms.

“I want people to see our resources as a gateway to starting a relationship with the local school, the local YMCA...and every organization that is serving youth in outdoor spaces,” Albarran says. “Reach out to these people and say, ‘Do you know about Seed Your Future? Here are some cool videos, and if you ever want, you can come on site and learn more about different [career] roles.’”

And if the prospect of helping to find the next generation of workers for the floriculture and horticulture industries sounds daunting, it doesn’t have to be — and industry professionals don’t have to do it alone. Albarran emphasizes the importance of relationship building to help address labor shortages.

Albarran suggests that floral business can seek out other floral professionals, community organizations and partners such as Seed Your Future to help teach children about careers with flowers and plants. Working together makes the task more manageable, she says, and those

partnerships can focus on finding two or three area schools or organizations to build relationships with.

She also wants to be sure that industry professionals know they have a partner in Seed Your Future.

“I always want the industry to know that they play a role in this and they have allies in Seed Your Future,” Albarran says. “They can volunteer with us, whether it’s through sharing our resources or volunteering and building relationships. And together, we can reach out to schools in their neighborhood.”

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About Seed Your Future

Seed Your Future is the movement to promote horticulture and inspire people to pursue careers working with plants. We envision a world where everyone understands and values the importance of plants and the people who work in the art, science, technology, and business of horticulture.

For more information, visit seedyourfuture.org

About The Society of American Florists

The Society of American Florists is the association that connects and cultivates a thriving floral community through training, education, marketing resources and advocacy.

Our vision: The power of flowers in every life.

For more information, visit SAFNow.org