

ANNALISE AND MARY PLANTING AT NSS

January In Review

Jalen Prater

January set the tone for the year with action and opportunity. With all hands on deck, Memphis Native Tree Works supported final preparations at the North Side Square ahead of its ribbon-cutting by installing native landscaping, including native azaleas in the courtyard—small interventions with long-term impact. At the same time, we launched Roots on the Ground, a paid, four-week workforce program designed as a direct on-ramp into plant production, tree care, and green careers.



Participants earn \$16.50 per hour while gaining hands-on technical skills, safety certifications, and clearer pathways into environmental work. Starting the year this way reinforces the mission: invest early, build capacity, and grow systems that strengthen Memphis' landscape and workforce for years to come



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by Jalen Prater

We are grateful to Memphis City Beautiful and Memphis Parks for their continued partnership and sustained investment in Memphis Native Tree Works. Their support allows us to educate residents on native plant ecology while showing, in real time, how these systems contribute to stronger, healthier communities. In Parkway Village, the McFarland Bioswale at McFarland Park serves as a working example—managing stormwater, supporting pollinators, and improving park function through native plantings including ironweed, blazing star, beggar’s tick, partridge pea, broom sedge, lanceleaf coreopsis, little bluestem, and switchgrass. Together, we are helping ensure this park is prepared for all walks of life—balancing ecological health with accessible, welcoming public space for the community.



MARY SPEAKING TO STUDENTS AT MCFARLAND PARK



MAYOR PAUL YOUNG AT NSS RIBBON CUTTING

North Side Square Ribbon Cutting

by Jalen Prater

The North Side Square ribbon cutting was truly one for the books, drawing together everyone who had a hand in the project’s development—from former students of the high school to the contractors and construction crews who brought the site back to life, alongside civic leaders such as Congressman Steve Cohen and Memphis Mayor Paul Young. The breadth of support surrounding The Works Inc. was on full display, reflecting the kind of cross-sector collaboration most city planners only hope to see. With the closure of the school in 2015, this site left a real void in the Vollintine neighborhood, and North Side Square represents a meaningful step toward restoring that sense of place, purpose, and opportunity. Guided by CEO Roshun Austin’s mission to Rebuild, Restore, Renew, and supported by Vice President and General Council Steve Barlow, the project is a clear demonstration of what that mission looks like in action. Memphis Native Tree Works will be there every step of the way—supporting land stewardship, leading community engagement, and assisting with job placement as we move toward the site’s grand opening announcement.



ENOCH PLANTING MUSCADINE GRAPE

Muscadine Grapes: A Native Vine with Deep Tennessee Roots

by Jalen Prater

This month, we planted two muscadine grape vines in the Medical District—an intentional start for a plant that demands space and patience. Muscadines are vigorous native climbers, which is why we began with just two vines trained along trellis strings. In the photo, Enoch is pictured alongside one of the newly planted vines, marking the first step in a long-term investment in productive, place-based landscaping.

Muscadine grapes are native to the Southeast and have been consumed in Tennessee for hundreds of years, first by Indigenous communities and later by early settlers who used the fruit for fresh eating, preserves, and wine. Today, that tradition continues through local producers like Delta Blues Winery, which showcases muscadines as a distinctly Southern grape with deep cultural roots. Despite their history, muscadines are poorly suited for mass production—their thick skins, uneven ripening, and lower yields make them incompatible with industrial harvesting and long-distance distribution.

These same characteristics make muscadines ideal for local food forests. They are naturally disease-resistant, well adapted to Tennessee's climate, and require fewer chemical inputs than conventional grape varieties. With proper care, muscadine vines typically begin producing fruit in three to five years and can remain productive for decades. In community-scale landscapes, they provide food, habitat, and shade—proof that some of the most valuable crops aren't built for scale, but for staying power.

Seed Saving & Foraging: Preparing for the Next Growing Season

by Jalen Prater

February brings a clear seasonal transition at The Works Urban Farm. Parsley, green onions, frisée, and beets are coming on, marking the close of our winter crop cycle. Carrots, kale, and lettuce held on through the end of the season and, pending melt-off from the recent snow, we are hopeful there will still be some harvestable produce left in the field.

This month also highlighted continued collaboration across programs. The Memphis Native Tree Works team provided vital assistance with the establishment and maintenance of native figs and mulberries planted at Washington Bottoms and Knight Arnold. Looking ahead, beginning February 14, The Works Urban Farm will begin offering herb and vegetable plant starts at the Cooper-Young Farmers Market, alongside native plant starts and trees provided by Memphis Native Tree Works. If you are interested in starting your own plants, join the Memphis Native Tree Works team at Lichterman Nature Center from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on February 14 for the annual Seed Swap.

As winter weather moved in, our teams shifted into protection mode—burying young trees under mulch, covering vulnerable crops in plastic, and moving retail plant inventory into the high tunnels ahead of the snow. These extra steps help safeguard months of work and ensure plants are ready to rebound as temperatures stabilize. It's a reminder that winter farming and forestry require constant adjustment, preparation, and patience to carry momentum into the spring season.



TY CLEANING BEETS

Volunteer Report

by Jalen Prater

This month, we observed Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a moment of deep significance in Memphis and a reminder that his legacy is best honored through action. We joined volunteers at Washington Bottoms Farm to pick up trash and plant native hydrangeas across the site, contributing to the care and dignity of a shared community space. Reflecting on Dr. King's commitment to nonviolent action, community engagement and philanthropy feel like a direct extension of the values he championed. Across the city, neighbors showed up in force—cleaning streets, supporting local organizations, and giving their time where it mattered most. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who made this volunteer day possible; your support and presence continue to make a real and lasting difference in Memphis.

VOLUNTEER SIGN UP SCAN BELOW



“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, *What are you doing for others?*” — Martin Luther King Jr.



VOLUNTEERS AT WASHINGTON BOTTOMS FARM