

The Free Gardener

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Begin With The Soil

The Ground of Growth and of Self

New Jersey

Growing the Garden State

Revival of Free Gardening in

North America

G.M. Alexander Griesbach

The Bluebell

Edition I

Spring 2026

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Revival of Free Gardening in

North America

How a Chance Discovery Sparked a Continental Rebirth of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners

The modern revival of the Free Gardeners in North America did not begin with a grand convention or a sweeping campaign. It began, fittingly, with curiosity—one brother's desire to understand the wider world of fraternalism.

A Seed Planted in Edmonton

Brother Stan Miller, a dedicated fraternalist from Edmonton, Alberta, encountered the Free Gardeners during his personal research into historic fraternal orders. Intrigued by their symbolism, moral teachings, and centuries-old traditions, he reached out to European branches of the Order. His inquiries eventually connected him with the Grand Lodge of Free Gardeners in Germany, a body that had preserved the lineage and ceremonial work.

In a remarkable twist of fate, one of the German Free Gardeners—Christian Rohrig, a native of Germany living in Edmonton—was appointed to introduce the degree work to North America. Brother Rohrig traveled to Germany, where he received the three foundational degrees and the Past Master degree, equipping him to charter new lodges abroad. Upon his return, the groundwork was laid for the revival. The result was the formation of Mount of Olives Lodge No. 30/3, the first active Free Gardener lodge on the continent in generations.

A New Generation of Seekers

The summer of 2024 marked a turning point. On June 30, 2024, Wilbert Lemuel reached out to Bro. Mario Jallow X (McCottrell) of Oklahoma, who had himself traveled to Edmonton to be initiated. Guided by Bro. Jallow, Within days, he [Lemuel] submitted an application to join Mount of Olive Lodge in Edmonton.



Members of Mount of Olives Lodge No 1 (Edmonton, Alberta (Canada))

The Journey to Edmonton

On September 6, 2024 seekers Dr. Simeon Queen and Wilbert Lemuel, along with Bro. Jallow, made the journey from the US to Canada. The gathering brought together men from across North America who shared a commitment to fraternal tradition and the revival of the Free Gardeners on the continent. Their meeting set the stage for a memorable weekend of fellowship, instruction, and historic progress for the Order.

On September 7, 2024, Worthy Master Christian Rohrig welcomed the visiting brethren and provided a brief tour of the Edmonton area surrounding the Orange Hall. After a stop for coffee at the Woodburn Café, the group learned that the Orange Hall was unavailable, prompting the ceremonies to be moved to the Acacia Masonic Hall, where all present were also Freemasons. There, under the direction of Worthy Master Rohrig and officers John Hayes, Stan Miller, Murray Milavsky, and Mario Jallow, Brothers Wilbert Lemuel of New Jersey and Simeon Queen of Texas received the three foundational degrees of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners.

“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow”

A New Chapter Begins

The new initiates were presented with certificates, ritual copies, and a Canadian-U.S. lapel pin, and Brother Jallow gifted Brother Lemuel an apron and cuffs to take home to New Jersey.

Following the ceremonies, the brethren—minus Brother Stan Miller—walked to O’Byrne’s Pub for lunch, where they shared a toast and discussed the future of the Order. It was there that the decision was made to form a Grand Lodge uniting Canada and the United States, with a proposed chartering date of April 25–27, 2025, to be held in Edmonton with the German Grand Lodge in attendance.

Later that evening, Brothers Lemuel, Queen, and Jallow continued their fellowship at the Q Cigar Lounge, where they exchanged plans for establishing new lodges in their respective states of New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Texas, marking the beginning of a new chapter for Free Gardening in North America. This social gathering would be instrumental to the formation of the United Council of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners in North America.



Logo of Mount of Olives Lodge No. 1 (Edmonton, Alberta (Canada))

NEW JERSEY DEGREE DAY
29 NOV. 2025
9:30AM-2:30PM
16 E Main Street, Moorestown, NJ
INFO.FREEGARDENERS@GMAIL.COM

THE ITINERARY

- 9:30 AM WELCOME GUESTS**
We will commence guest entry at 9:30 a.m. All approved applicants are required to sign in upon arrival. Refreshments will be provided.
- 10:00 AM APPRENTICE DEGREE**
The Apprentice Degree Ceremony will commence following the welcome of all guests and their opportunity to sign in.
- 11:00 AM JOURNEYMAN DEGREE**
The Journeyman Degree Ceremony will take place after a brief intermission following the Apprentice Degree Ceremony.
- 12:00 PM LUNCHEON**
Lunch will be served promptly following the conclusion of the Journeyman Degree Ceremony.
- 1:00 PM MASTER GARDENER DEGREE**
The Master Gardener Degree Ceremony will be held, followed by the establishment of a lodge and closing remarks.

Itinerary for the First Degree Day in the United States (New Jersey)

The United Council

After the opening of the North America Grand Lodge in Canada from May 23–25, the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners entered a new phase of coordinated growth. Brothers Wilbert Lemuel, Mario Jallow, Simeon Queen, and Nathaniel Clayton began discussing the creation of a United Council to support the Order’s expanding administrative needs. They drafted a constitution and bylaws and submitted them to the Grand Lodge for review. With the Grand Lodge’s approval, the United Council was officially established on September 28, 2025, marking a major step in strengthening the Order’s foundation.

The Council’s first officers—Brother Lemuel as Chairman, Brother Jallow as Vice-Chairman, Brother Clayton as Secretary-General, Brother M. Cupeles as Treasurer, and Brother Queen as Archivist—quickly set the tone for organized expansion. Under their leadership, the Order grew from two lodges in Canada to six lodges in the United States and one in Haiti. Additional lodges are already in development, reflecting rising enthusiasm across the continent. Together, these achievements signal a vibrant new era for Free Gardening in North America.

New Jersey:

Giving New Meaning To The Garden State



The revival of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners in the United States is unfolding across many regions, each contributing its own energy and character to the movement's return. Among these growing centers, New Jersey has emerged as one of the most vibrant, with four active lodges now flourishing: Red Oak Lodge No. 4, Dragon's Breath Lodge No. 7, Black Ash Lodge No. 8, and Blue Lotus Lodge No. 9. Together, they form a dynamic cluster that complements the Order's expansion in other states and strengthens the national network of Free Gardeners.

Red Oak Lodge No. 4 holds a special place in this story. Its name draws inspiration from the Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), New Jersey's state tree—a symbol of strength, resilience, beauty, and enduring wisdom. The Red Oak's deep roots and towering presence reflect the spirit of the Free Gardener, making it a fitting emblem for a lodge committed to unity, perseverance, and the timeless bond between humanity and nature.

The lodge's name was formally adopted on July 8, 2025, by Bro. Michael Cupeles, Bro. Jerry E. Loatman III, and Bro. Wilbert Lemuel (PMG), following official authorization from the North America Grand Lodge, A.O.F.G., Inc.



That chapter came to life on November 8, 2025, when Red Oak Lodge No. 4 initiated its first class of seekers. Four candidates—New Jersey's own Michael Cupeles and Jerry E. Loatman III, along with Daniel Gutierrez and Amanda Mendez of California—were initiated and advanced through all three degrees, becoming the lodge's first Master Gardeners. Their advancement signaled the start of a living legacy that continues to grow.

With four lodges now active and more seekers joining the movement nationwide, New Jersey stands as a strong and steady branch in the broader revival of Free Gardening. Rooted like the Red Oak itself, its lodges continue to grow and contribute to a flourishing national landscape.

The Bluebell

Alexander Griesbach, G.M.

If we Free Gardeners speak of the Garden, we rarely mean a place. We mean a state. An inner landscape. A sacred space in which a human being remembers who they are, before the world shapes them. And that is why one flower touches me so deeply when I think of our work: the bluebell. Not loud. Not showy. Yet filled with a quiet call. A bell that doesn't ring to demand attention, but to awaken something deeper. In Scottish and wider British Isles folklore, bluebells carry a double signature: they are enchantment and warning at the same time.

They are often linked with the "Otherworld," and some tales say that hearing their bells may "call" you beyond the ordinary. In other traditions they were even associated with the threshold of death, sometimes referred to as "dead men's bells." And that is exactly where their Free Gardener meaning begins for me. Because a Free Gardener is not someone who only works in sunlight. A Free Gardener learns to orient themselves in half-shadow too. Not to romanticize the Garden, but to treat it as holy.

To me, the bluebell is the flower of that moment when you realize: You are no longer in the old world...but you are not yet fully in the new one. It is the flower of the threshold. And thresholds are the heart of every initiation. Because at a threshold, the question is not whether you are brave. It is whether you are honest. There is a thread in older lore that feels almost uncannily aligned with our way: it was said that a person wearing a wreath of bluebells could speak only the truth.

How fitting. Truth is one of our four virtues. And often the most uncomfortable one. Because truth is not first a weapon aimed at others. Truth is first a gaze turned inward. And here is the point that matters most to me. In the reception into Free Gardener work, the bluebell holds a special role. Not as decoration. Not as a pretty accessory. But as an inner emblem of the first step across the threshold. Because reception means: you do not merely enter a room. you enter a way of being. You join a fellowship that does not seek to shine outward, but to grow inward. And the bluebell embodies that perfectly: It is the sign of the quiet call that made you seek in the first place.

It is the sign of humility, because its head bows—not out of weakness, but out of dignity. And it is the sign of truth, because it reminds you: To enter the Garden you do not need to be perfect but you do need to be real. In this sense the bluebell, at reception, becomes a gentle mirror: “What are you bringing into the Garden?” Not: What do you perform? Not: What do you prove? But: What are you willing to look at honestly? And perhaps that is the most beautiful “magic” of this flower: It does not force. It does not threaten. It simply invites.

Yet it makes one thing clear: who truly enters does not only step in— they also leave something behind. And then begins what Free Gardening is at its core: A path where Love, Wisdom, Harmony, and Truth stop feeling like words and start feeling like living soil beneath your hands. The bluebell is more than a flower it is the call of the threshold: truth, humility, and the beginning of the inner Garden.



Brother Alexander Griesbach is the current Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Free Gardeners (Switzerland, Germany and Italy)

Begin With The Soil

The Ground of Growth and the Ground of Self



There is a reason every serious gardener, sooner or later, stops talking about plants and begins talking about soil.

At the beginning, we are fascinated by what we can see. Leaves. Stems. Fruit. Color. Height. Visible progress feels like proof that something is working. But with time, observation deepens. The gardener's attention shifts downward —below the surface— to what is unseen.

The plant is not the beginning of growth. It is the evidence of it. The beginning lies in the soil.



Soil is not simply dirt. It is a structured, living system composed of mineral particles, organic matter, water, air, and microscopic life. The United States Department of Agriculture describes soil as a natural body capable of sustaining plant life through its structured composition and biological activity.¹ A healthy soil contains mineral structure for stability, organic matter for nourishment, and pore spaces filled with water and air so roots can both drink and breathe.²

When these elements are in balance, growth stabilizes. When they are not, growth struggles. This is the first and most humbling law of cultivation: Visible life depends upon invisible preparation. No amount of enthusiasm can override poor soil. The finest seed will weaken in compacted ground. Roots suffocate where oxygen cannot circulate. Nutrients fail to move when structure collapses. The seed is not the problem. The ground is the question. And the moment we understand this in horticulture, we begin to recognize it everywhere else.

Soil as Structure: What the Garden Teaches Without Words

To the untrained eye, soil looks uniform. To the cultivator, it reveals architecture. Mineral particles — sand, silt, clay — form the physical framework. Organic matter contributes nutrients and supports microbial ecosystems. Water enables transport. Air enables respiration.³ The spaces between particles — pore spaces — determine whether roots can expand freely or remain constricted.



Compacted soil collapses these pore spaces. Oxygen disappears. Roots struggle to penetrate. Life becomes fragile.

Soil structure determines whether growth stabilizes or fails...

Brady and Weil explain that soil serves not only as mechanical support, but also as a metabolic environment enabling nutrient exchange and root development.⁴ Roots must establish before the plant can rise visibly. The invisible must stabilize before the visible can endure.

This is not only a biological law. It is a human one. Every authentic path of refinement — whether philosophical, spiritual, or fraternal — begins with foundation. Character precedes illumination. Discipline precedes advancement. Structure precedes elevation. The garden does not announce this law. It demonstrates it.

Dormancy and the Intelligence of Waiting

A seed contains a complete design for life. Yet it does not grow simply because it exists. It waits. OpenStax Biology explains that seeds remain dormant until environmental conditions — moisture, temperature, and oxygen — indicate that survival is possible.⁵ Dormancy is not failure. It is intelligent preservation. The seed waits for readiness. This is one of the most profound lessons horticulture offers: growth does not respond to pressure; it responds to alignment. Hermetic philosophy expresses this through the principle of correspondence — that transformation occurs when internal and external conditions harmonize.⁶

The individual does not force awakening; he aligns with it. Kabbalistic teaching describes the human being as a vessel that must be prepared before illumination can be sustained.⁷ Alchemical tradition describes transformation as refinement of prima materia — the original substance — through lawful stages.⁸ Different traditions. Same law. Preparation precedes manifestation. The seed does not grow in hostile ground. The soul does not mature in an unprepared foundation.

Soil as Prima Materia: The Alchemical Ground

Alchemy begins with prima materia — the original, unrefined substance. It is not discarded. It is refined. Soil embodies this principle perfectly. Soil contains decay. Organic matter originates in decomposition. Yet from this apparent ending emerges fertility. Transformation reorganizes what already exists. Titus Burckhardt explains that prima materia represents the undifferentiated ground from which higher forms emerge through purification.⁸ Carl Jung later observed that alchemy symbolically reflects psychological transformation.⁹ The garden becomes a visible alchemical laboratory. The cultivator does not create life. He creates conditions that allow life to refine itself. This distinction changes everything. Cultivation is cooperation with law, not domination of matter.

“As Above, So Below”: The Garden as Mirror

Hermetic teaching preserves the maxim: “As above, so below.”⁶ This is not mysticism detached from reality; it is observation of correspondence. Preparation of soil mirrors preparation of consciousness. Removing stones from ground mirrors removing obstruction from thought. Aerating compacted earth mirrors loosening rigid patterns of perception. The garden becomes a mirror for inner life. When we tend soil, we tend readiness. When we observe soil honestly, we learn to observe ourselves honestly. The laws do not change. Only the scale does.



The Vessel and Capacity

Kabbalistic teaching emphasizes the refinement of the vessel — the inner structure capable of receiving illumination.⁷ Without preparation, illumination destabilizes rather than elevates. Soil functions as that vessel in physical form. Without structure, roots collapse. Without structure, consciousness fragments. Capacity determines sustainability. Preparation determines capacity. This is why authentic fraternal systems and initiatory disciplines insist on gradual progression. Advancement without foundation leads to imbalance. The garden confirms what tradition has long preserved: foundation first.

The Discipline of Imagination

Imagination is often misunderstood as fantasy. In cultivation, imagination is vision disciplined by structure. The gardener prepares soil for a plant not yet visible. He sees future form in present preparation. Giordano Bruno described imagination as a formative faculty — capable of shaping perception and directing intentional transformation when grounded in discipline.¹⁰ Imagination alone does not produce growth. But imagination aligned with structure directs growth. Without vision, preparation lacks purpose. Without structure, vision lacks stability. Together, they form the beginning of transformation.

The Free Gardener's Insight

The Ancient Order of Free Gardeners understood that horticulture is more than agriculture. Historical records describe horticultural tools as symbolic instruments of moral cultivation. The pruning knife represents refinement. The square represents alignment. The compasses represent measured restraint.¹¹ These are not decorative symbols. They are structural truths expressed through craft. The garden teaches discipline.

The tools represent discipline. The individual becomes the ground under cultivation. As a Master Free Gardener, my engagement with horticulture began symbolically long before it became physical. Now, as I enter the study of soil itself, I see the continuity clearly. The symbolic sciences prepared perception. The physical science now tests it. Hermetic teaching insists that knowledge becomes complete when understanding and embodiment converge.⁶ So this work is not theory. It is integration.

The Law of Gradual Becoming

Charles Darwin concluded his observations of life by describing “endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful” emerging gradually through lawful development.¹² Growth unfolds in sequence. Root before stem. Foundation before structure. Preparation before harvest. The garden does not rush. It does not panic. It responds to law. And so must we.



The First Discipline: Learn to Observe

Before planting anything, observe. Touch the soil. Notice its texture. Watch how water moves. See where it compacts and where it breathes. Observation is the first act of cultivation. The same discipline applies inwardly. Before attempting transformation, observe the ground of your own life. Where are you compacted? Where are you depleted? Where are you ready?

Where are you resisting? Transformation begins with honesty. The soil represents readiness.

The seed represents intention. Together, they begin cultivation. In learning to prepare the ground, one begins to understand the lawful process of becoming. The garden does not merely grow plants. It grows the one who tends it.





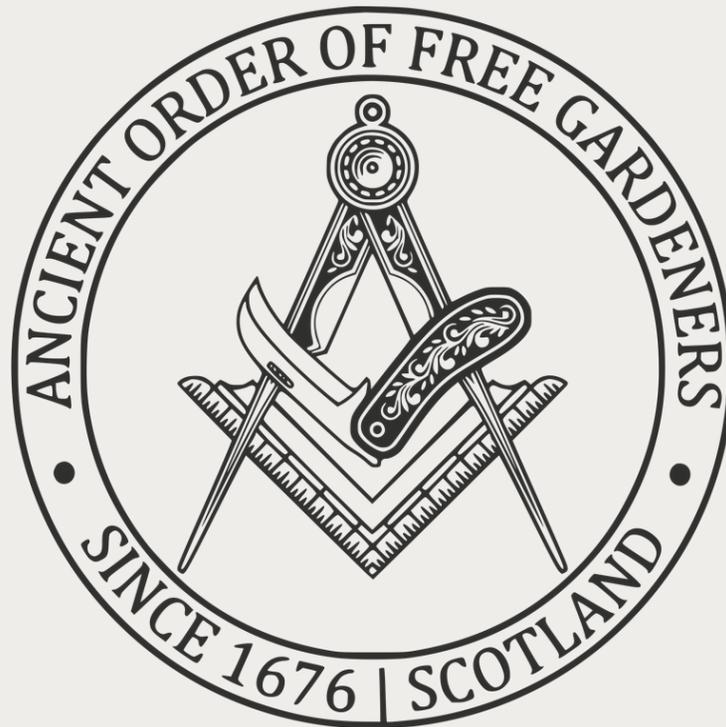
Brother Michael Cupeles is the current Worthy Master of Black Ash Lodge #8 (Atlantic County, NJ), and serves on the A.O.F.G. United Council as treasurer.

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SUBMISSIONS

If you would like to submit a piece for consideration in the Summer 2026 edition you can submit a draft of your article at info.freegardeners@gmail.com