

Mema's Garden: Honoring a Beloved Space

Mere steps outside the High Meadows School nurse's clinic sits a quaint, perhaps even unassuming garden that bears the name "Mema's Garden." When the High Meadows founders purchased the property, co-founder Bill Crawford's mother, Florence "Mema" Crawford, planted a vegetable garden near what was then the heart of the campus. Mema lived on the property and tended to the garden every day until she moved away. Only after her departure was the garden named in her honor. Today, a restoration process is underway, led by HMS alumna and faculty member Anne Lovatt.

Ms. Lovatt is following in the footsteps of many individuals who have shown love and care for this special space. "In 2000, Chris Robie tended the garden," Ms. Lovatt recalled. "She worked hard to build a gardening program at High Meadows and had kids and families working alongside each other. Students became Georgia Junior Master Gardeners, and the group transformed the garden into a beautiful, pollinator-friendly place."

In the early 2000s, the garden also played an integral role in the community with produce donated to a nearby food bank. Eventually, Tim Philbin and Doerta Wohmann-Schmieta divided the care of the garden. Philbin, whose relative in the Caribbean had extensive gardening expertise, introduced tropical plants. Wohmann-Schmieta, a certified Georgia Master Gardener, focused on cultivating native plants.

Sadly, the once-vibrant garden became overrun with invasive species. "We learned that the milkweed in Mema's Garden was not native to Georgia and was invasive," Ms. Lovatt said. "You want to plant it on the edge of woods or near a retention pond, so it doesn't impact anything. The milkweed and Chinese yams choked out other beautiful plants."

Determined and deeply connected to both the campus and the garden, Ms. Lovatt teamed up with passionate faculty, staff, and students to reverse the damage. It's a long-term effort that will pay off — not in days or weeks, but over months and years. With 30 years of experience at High Meadows as both a student and teacher, Ms. Lovatt brings deep knowledge and heartfelt commitment to the project. "We need safe spaces for all the species in the garden and genetic diversity of plants," she mentioned. "We're eradicating what's harmful and trying to plant what's not only helpful but also visually appealing."

The team removed invasive milkweed pods and dug out Chinese yam tubers, many of which stretched up to 12 feet underground. Students have been busy tilling the soil and identifying plants worth saving. "We've transplanted hundreds of daffodil bulbs, irises, lilies, crocuses, and spiderwort," Ms. Lovatt said. "If we can save it, we're moving it."

A gazebo in the garden offers a cool refuge from the hot Georgia sun. Nearby, a bench swing built by alums in recognition of the school's 40th anniversary invites visitors to slow down, reflect, and enjoy the evolving beauty of Mema's Garden. Students and other community members painted the floor tiles, and if you look closely, you'll find one with a painting of Mema, completed by High Meadows Camp Leadership Team Member Annie Kimball. The tiles are a lasting tribute that connects the present to the school's roots.

The complete transformation of Mema's Garden will take nearly two years and will involve gardeners, land workers, and even young designers. "This project will take a lot of manpower," Ms. Lovatt said. "Our Middle School students have been mocking up garden designs and talking with younger students to make it an ideal space for all ages."

The restored Mema's Garden will serve as an outdoor learning space where curiosity can grow alongside the native plants. Though the full transformation of Mema's Garden is a slow process, the journey honors the spirit of community, resilience, and a sincere reverence for nature — values that have always grown deep at High Meadows.