

## **Chicago Excellence in Gardening Awards Announces 2023 Award Winners**

The [Chicago Excellence in Gardening Awards](#) (CEGA), Chicago's only citywide gardening awards program, announced its 2023 award winners at a ceremony at Wild Blossom Meadery & Winery Sunday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, to an audience of about 200 people—winners and their guests. Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRDGC) delivered a short keynote address, and CEGA founder Mike Nowak acted as master of ceremonies.

This year's contest had entries from 43 wards and award winners from 33 wards, as well as honorable mentions from several others. A number of wards had multiple winners, but the "best bloomin' ward" in the city was the 19th, comprising primarily the Beverly and East Beverly neighborhoods, which had 7 award winners. The 40th ward was second, with 5 award winners. We honored 14 community gardens, 5 school gardens, 2 urban farms, 4 other organizations, and 42 residential gardens.

Nowak presented sustainability activist Julie Samuels with CEGA's 2023 Garden Angel Award. Samuels is a co-founder of Chicago Community Gardeners Association and a founding member of CEGA. She was honored for her steadfast support of social justice, sustainability and the value of urban gardening.

"Unless you're actually at the event, it's difficult to comprehend the unbridled joy of gardeners as they accept their awards, talk shop and tell horticultural stories about their gardening year," says Mike Nowak, awards founder. "And they're not just 'gardeners.' They are real, if often unsung, Chicago heroes."