



2026 Youth Essay Contest Guidelines

Theme: How Will We Be Gardening in the Next 250 Years?

Eligibility: Open to all youth in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12

Deadline: Indiana Garden Clubs must send their winning entries (one per grade level) to the State Youth Contests Chair by December 1, 2026. Clubs may set their own local deadline to ensure timing for local scoring and submission to the State.

Length and Format: Essays must be no more than 600 words, using a font that is no smaller than 11 point. All essays must be submitted in Microsoft Word.

Other Requirements:

- Entries must include a cover page with student's name (*), school, home address, and sponsoring garden club.
- Students must incorporate the theme "How Will We Be Gardening in the Next 250 Years?" into the essay, but not as the title of the essay itself.
- Any references used must be listed.

State Scoring:

- Essays will be checked against AI.
- Scale of points:
 - Originality – 20%
 - Central idea of essay is clear and addresses the theme question – 20%
 - Organization of ideas uses a logical structure, clear paragraphs and appropriate transitions – 20%
 - Vocabulary, grammar and mechanics effectively communicate meaning 0 20%
 - Creative title – 10%
 - Conformance to length – 10%
 - Total 100%

Winners: The State will select one winner per grade level based on the scale of points above. This is an Indiana-only contest conducted by The Garden Club of Indiana, Inc. Winning essays will be published on the TGCI website and highlighted on the TGCI Facebook page. (*)

Submission to the State: Garden Clubs must send all local winning entries via email to the TGCI State Youth Contests Chair, Pam Schumm, pamschumm@gmail.com; and a hard-copy mailed to her at 10322 N 800 E, Syracuse, IN **by the December 1, 2026** deadline.

(*) Youth privacy is important to The Garden Club of Indiana, Inc. Thus, winning essayists will only be identified by first name, last name initial, sponsoring garden club, city and state.