

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Seeds Laughter with “Native Gardens,” a Comedy about Two Backyards and One Fence, from Feb. 18 – Mar. 8

Westport Country Playhouse will stage “Native Gardens,” a comedy about well-intentioned neighbors who become feuding enemies, playing February 18 through March 8. The comic culture clash is written by Karen Zacarías, who was recently hailed by *American Theatre* magazine as one of the 10 most-produced playwrights in the U.S. Director is JoAnn M. Hunter. “Native Gardens” is the fourth production in the Playhouse’s 2024-25 “Season of Laughter,” a slate of five shows from October through April, chosen specifically to energize the community with a welcoming sense of warmth, humor, and joy.

“We’re thrilled to present Karen Zacarías’ celebrated play ‘Native Gardens’ on the Playhouse stage,” said Mark Shanahan, Playhouse artistic director. “Zacarías’ brilliant comedy is a laugh-out-loud story that masterfully balances sharp wit with hilariously bad behavior even as it explores deeper issues about race, class, and what it truly means to be a good neighbor in modern America. Director JoAnn M. Hunter has assembled an extraordinary cast and design team, and we know audiences will be thoroughly entertained as we continue our ‘Season of Laughter’ with this wonderfully funny and timely tale.”

In “Native Gardens,” expectant parents Tania and Pablo Del Valle move in next door to longtime suburbanites Virginia and Frank Butley. A dispute over their yard’s property line spirals into an epic, flower-flinging war over taste, class, personal identity...and gardening. With Pablo’s upcoming office barbecue party threatening the Butleys’ plans for the future of their yard, can these couples ever learn to love their neighbor and mend the fences that separate them?

The cast includes **Paula Leggett Chase** as Virginia Butley (Broadway: “Tootsie,” “On the 20th Century,” “Bye Bye Birdie,” “Curtains,” “The Pajama Game,” “Dirty Rotten Scoundrels,” “Kiss Me, Kate,” “Damn Yankees,” “Crazy for You,” “A Chorus Line”; 2020 Drama Desk Featured Actress nominee for “The Unsinkable Molly Brown”; Tours: “A Chorus Line,” “Cabaret”; TV/Film: “The Sound of Music, Live”; @paulaleggett, www.paulaleggettchase.com); **Linedy Genao** as Tania De Valle (Native of Hamden, CT; first Latina performer to originate the leading role in an Andrew Lloyd Webber Broadway musical; named to *Variety*’s “Broadway Actors to Watch List”; Broadway: “Bad Cinderella” as Cinderella, “On Your Feet!,” “Dear Evan Hansen”; Off Broadway: “Women on Fire”; Tours: “Dear Evan Hansen”; Regional: “Passing Through,” “West Side Story,” “In the Heights”; TV/Film: “Death Saved My Life”; @linedygenao).

Adam Heller as Frank Butley (Westport Country Playhouse: Script in Hand playreading “The Outsider”; Broadway’s “Some Like it Hot,” “It Shoulda Been You,” “Elf,” “Caroline, or Change,” “Victor/Victoria,” “Les Misérables”; Off-Broadway’s “Merrily We Roll Along,” and others; Goodspeed’s “Fiddler on the Roof” - Connecticut Critics Circle Award/Best Actor), “Rags”; other regional theatre includes “Chicago”- St. Louis Theater Circle Award, “1776,” “Gypsy,” “Falsettos,” “The Chosen”; NYU/Tisch); and **Anthony Michael Martinez** as Pablo Del Valle (Off-Broadway: Classic Stage Co., 59E59, Vineyard Theatre, New Ohio, The Flea, Theatre Row. Regional: Great Lakes Theatre, Idaho Shakespeare, more; Film/TV: “After Forever” Amazon Prime series; MFA: Shakespeare Theatre Company’s Academy for Classical Acting in DC;

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resident teaching artist for Red Bull Theater, Classic Stage Co., New York Theatre Workshop; www.anthonymichaelmartinez.net; IG [anthony.m.martinez](https://www.instagram.com/anthony.m.martinez)).

Playwright **Karen Zacarías**'s award-winning plays include "The Copper Children," "Destiny of Desire," "Native Gardens," "The Book Club Play," "Legacy of Light," "Mariela in the Desert," "The Sins of Sor Juana," and the adaptations of "Just Like Us," "Into the Beautiful North," and "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent." Her musical "Chasing George Washington" premiered at The Kennedy Center for Performing Arts. She is the author of 10 renowned TYA musicals, including "Ella Enchanted: The Musical." She is one of the inaugural resident playwrights at Arena Stage, a core founder of the Latinx Theatre Commons, and founder of the award-winning Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT). YPT was cited by the Obama administration as one of the best arts-education programs on the nation. Zacarías was voted 2018 Washingtonian of the Year by *Washingtonian Magazine* for her advocacy work involving the arts. She has a BA with distinction from Stanford University and a Masters in creative writing from Boston University. Born in Mexico, Zacarías now lives in Washington D.C. with her husband and three children.

Director **JoAnn M. Hunter** has over 30 credits on Broadway, the West End, and Australia. Westport Country Playhouse: "The Best Is Yet to Come" 2024 fundraiser; Broadway (choreographer/director): "Bad Cinderella," "Disaster," "School of Rock," "On A Clear Day," "Broadway Bound"; City Center Encores: "Love Life"; UK: "SuperYu," "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," "School of Rock"; Upcoming: "Jo: The Little Women Musical," "Yasuke-The Legend of the Black Samurai," "Birds of NY" (with Sophie B. Hawkins.)

Creative team includes **Anna Louizos**, set designer; **David C. Woolard**, costume designer; **Charlie Morrison**, lighting designer; **John Gromada**, sound designer; and **Abigail Zaccari**, stage manager.

Running time is approximately 90 minutes; no intermission. Appropriate for ages 12 and up. Single tickets start at \$40 and are subject to change based upon availability. Buy early for best prices. For information on special offers, including discounts for students, senior citizens, educators, military and first responders, Indigenous peoples, professional playwrights, and groups, as well as options for pay-what-you-will and library passes, visit www.westportplayhouse.org/visit/box-office/.

Performance schedule is Tuesday at 7 p.m., Wednesday at 2 and 7 p.m., Thursday at 7 p.m., Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 3 and 8 p.m., and Sunday at 3 p.m. (No Wed. or Sat. matinees during preview week). Special series include Taste of Tuesdays (Feb. 18), Together at the Table (Feb. 19), Pride Night (Feb. 20), Opening Night (Feb. 22), Sunday Symposium (Feb. 23), Open Captions (Mar. 2), Backstage Pass (Mar. 5), and Thursday TalkBack (Mar. 6).

"Native Gardens" production sponsors are Shoreline Wealth Management Group at Morgan Stanley and LaurelRock, with additional support from Gilbertie's Garden Center & Gilbertie's Herbs, Westport Farmers' Market, and Westport Hardware. 2025 Opening Night Post-Show Reception Sponsor is RDM Financial Group at Hightower. 2025 Together at the Table Sponsors are Paige and Jodi Couture, with generous support from Westport Rotary. 2025 Programming and Season Sponsor is Barbara Streicker. 2025 Media sponsors are Mofly Media and WSHU Public Radio. Westport Country Playhouse is a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit organization.

For full details, visit: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/native-gardens/>

Westport Country Playhouse's 94th season is named "The Season of Laughter," with a slate of comedies, from October through April, ranging from family friendly plays to old-fashioned romps, each offering biting and topical humor. "Theatre People," a throwback to the classic screwball comedies of yesteryear, will conclude the season from March 25 through April 12. For 2024-25 season details, visit: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/2024-2025-season/>

A complete schedule of Playhouse events is available at westportplayhouse.org. All play titles, artists, dates, and times are subject to change.

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For Westport Country Playhouse information and tickets, visit westportplayhouse.org or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, toll-free at 1-888-927-7529. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), Instagram ([wcplayhouse](https://www.instagram.com/wcplayhouse)), and YouTube ([WestportPlayhouse](https://www.youtube.com/WestportPlayhouse)). Westport Country Playhouse is located at 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport.

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