

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Presents Sunday Symposium: "Planting Our Gardens – A Conversation about Growing Stronger Together"

Westport Board of Ed Chair Lee Goldstein and cast member Linedy Genao will be guest speakers on topic inspired by Playhouse production of "Native Gardens."

Westport Country Playhouse will present a Sunday Symposium, "Planting Our Gardens – A Conversation about Growing Stronger Together," exploring themes of inclusivity, respect, and equity, on Sunday, February 23, following the 3 p.m. performance of "Native Gardens," an insightful comedy about neighbors from different cultures who clash over the property line that separates their gardens.

Guest speakers will be Lee Goldstein, chair, Westport board of education, who will discuss the vital work being done by No Place for Hate, an Anti-Defamation League program designed to improve school climate; and Linedy Genao, "Native Gardens" cast member and the first Latina performer to originate the leading role in an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical on Broadway.

Inspired by the production of "Native Gardens," the symposium will delve into cultivating better understanding in shared spaces.

"Art enables us to see the world as we know it - as well as from other people's perspectives," said Goldstein. "And so art is the great empathy builder. Westport Public Schools' commitment to No Place for Hate also works to nourish our students' sense of connection, to recognize and celebrate all our shared humanity. I'm so excited to partner with Westport Country Playhouse to discuss this beautiful and funny play, 'Native Gardens,' and imagine the seeds we might plant and what we may grow together."

Goldstein has been active in education in both her professional and personal life as an educator and an advocate. A graduate of Yale University, she is a former high school English teacher and professional writer/editor. Goldstein served as a member of the board of education in Bedford, NY. Since moving to Westport, she has been active in the PTA at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Genao, a native of Hamden, CT, plays the role of Tania De Valle in "Native Gardens." She appeared on Broadway in Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Bad Cinderella" as Cinderella, "On Your Feet!," and "Dear Evan Hansen." Genao was named to *Variety's* "Broadway Actors to Watch List."

Sunday Symposium moderator is Mark Shanahan, Playhouse artistic director. "Our 'Native Gardens' symposium offers the perfect opportunity to bring our community together for an open and meaningful conversation," said Shanahan. "This discussion will explore how we perceive cultural identity, confront bias and bigotry, and recognize the values that unite us as neighbors and fellow citizens. We are honored to welcome Lee Goldstein to our stage to impart the inspiring work of No Place for Hate, an initiative dedicated to fostering awareness and harmony in our schools. Just as in our brilliantly thoughtful and funny current production of 'Native Gardens,' the act of sharing personal stories has the power to bridge

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divides, foster empathy, and help our communities grow. I hope you'll join us for an informative and uplifting afternoon at the Playhouse."

The Symposium will begin at approximately 4:30 p.m., following the 3 p.m. matinee performance of "Native Gardens." The Playhouse Sunday Symposium program is free and open to the public. The discussion will be followed by an interactive dialogue with the audience.

"Native Gardens" is written by Karen Zacarias, 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. The story is about expectant parents Tania and Pablo Del Valle who 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?

Playing February 18 through March 8, "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.

The Sunday Symposium Series is supported, in part, by the White Barn Program of the Lucille Lortel Foundation. "Native Gardens" Corporate Supporters are Cindy Raney & Team at Coldwell Banker Global Luxury, LaurelRock, and The Shoreline Wealth Management Group at Morgan Stanley, 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. Media sponsors are Moffly 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/>

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

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). Westport Country Playhouse is located at 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport.

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