

Future of Children's Gardening Addressed at 2003 Symposium

by Maureen Hartshorn

SOME SPECTACULAR ideas sprouted in Northern Virginia from July 24 to 26 during the 11th annual National Children and Youth Garden Symposium. More than 200 youth garden experts from various disciplines came together to share ideas and brainstorm the future of children's gardens and gardening. One common theme emerged from the three-day gathering: To achieve the AHS vision of "making America

a nation of gardeners, a land of gardens," children must be the starting point.

"This was such a profound experience for the people who came from all over the country," said Mary Ann Patterson, AHS director of national programs and public relations. "It showed us how far we have come, it stretched our ideas of what we can accomplish, and it forged relationships through which we can make it happen."

There were far more workshops and opportunities to see model children's gardening programs in action during the three-day symposium than can be covered in this space. For additional information, visit the AHS Web site (www.ahs.org).

GROWING THE FUTURE

Norm Lownds, associate professor of horticulture at Michigan State University, moderated the Growing the Future workshop, in which participants reviewed the history of children's gardening, pinpointed successful existing programs, and used interactive sessions to generate excitement about the future of youth gardens.

By the end of the workshop, the group had identified several goals, including teaching kids to be trustees of the earth, improving teacher education and certification requirements, establishing gardens and outdoor classrooms at all schools, and supporting research that evaluates the positive effects of gardening in character development and student test scores.

"Because we identified some of the first steps we need to take and outlined a plan for the future," said Lownds, "we can come back a year from now and see what progress we've made."



A model of the Parthenon at the outdoor classroom area at Tuckahoe Elementary School.

CHILDREN'S GARDEN DESIGN WORKSHOP

The Children's Garden Design workshop, held at Green Spring Gardens in Alexandria, was hosted by the garden's designer and horticulturist, Cindy Brown, along with Charlotte Albers, children's education coordinator.

"The staff's knowledge of plants and how they could be used to reach out to children was amazing," said workshop attendee Laurie DeMarco, a horticulture and education consultant.

Participants enjoyed seeing many simple and inexpensive ideas for engaging kids' imagination at Green Spring's Family Garden, ranging from a quiet tea-party nook to a bathtub full of plants, complete with a working shower.

DISCOVERY SCHOOLYARD

Symposium attendees were also im-

pressed and inspired by the Discovery Schoolyard workshop held at Tuckahoe Elementary School, a public school in Arlington County that incorporates outdoor and academic learning into the curriculum for all grade levels.

During two scheduled tours, visitors had a chance to tour Tuckahoe's seven outdoor garden classrooms. Among these is a pond habitat designed to simulate the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and a small-scale Parthenon that brings history to life in the Ancient Plaza classroom.

"I am involved in a consortium of organizations working to identify the elements that should be part of a model school garden program," said Lynne Cherry, a naturalist and children's book author. "But here was Tuckahoe, which is the prototype—they are integrating all aspects of the curriculum in their outdoor classrooms

and doing everything we would hope to have in a model program.”

AWARDS AND KEYNOTE ADDRESS

At a banquet on Friday, the 2003 AHS Jane L. Taylor Award for excellence in youth gardening was presented to Delaine Eastin, former state superintendent of public instruction in California, for her initiative to institute a garden in every public school in her state.

Jane L. Taylor, for whom the AHS award is named, presented the symposium's keynote address.

Children's gardens, said Taylor, should be fun, educational, accessible, and interactive. The objective, she added, should be to get kids interested in real plants. "Don't water down what you're doing in the garden," Taylor said. "Plants are the focus."

Taylor inspired everyone in attendance to strive for future improvements in youth gardens. "The lessons and the seeds you are planting now will come back in the future," Taylor said.

Maureen Hartshorn is editorial intern for The American Gardener.

A Rare Treat for Symposium Attendees

About 25 symposium participants had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity on June 25 to see Smithsonian botanist Dan Nicolson dissect the flower of the rare titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*), also known as "corpse flower," which had just bloomed at the U.S. Botanical Garden (USBG). (See related story on page 16).

Christine Flanagan, USBG manager of public programs, invited the AHS group to join Smithsonian and USBG employees in a viewing of Nicolson's machete-assisted "autopsy" of the plant, which had, fortunately, lost its trademark stench by that time.

"We all felt like plant nerds, but we didn't dare miss it," said YGS attendee David Pippin, president of Creations & Ideas, Inc. Because the display had just closed to the public at the time the dissection took place, Pippin said hundreds of people were gathered outside, faces against the glass, hoping to catch a glimpse of Nicolson's surgery. "It was exciting to see that one plant could create so much interest," he said. —M.H.



Botanist Dan Nicolson lifts off the spathe of the titan arum as Deborah Bell, museum specialist at the Smithsonian, watches.

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