BY CHARLOTTE ALBERS

Youth Garden

Educators and gardening enthusiasts found plenty of ideas

ENTHUSIASTIC, PASSIONATE, creative, energized—these are the kind of adjectives that captured the spirit of the presenters and attendees at the AHS 2005 National Children & Youth Garden Symposium in Atlanta, Georgia, this past July. Nearly 200 participants from around the United States and overseas shared ideas and inspirational stories during the three-day symposium, which was jointly hosted by Atlanta Botanical Garden and Wonderland Gardens. Educational sessions were held on the campus of Emory University.

From the opening general session headlined by keynote speaker **Sharon Lovejoy,** to 20 educational presentations, and behind-the-scenes tours of regional gardens, there were ample opportunities to learn how to use gardens and nature for interdisciplinary teaching across all age levels.

Several national organizations that have strong youth gardening programs were represented at the symposium, including the **Junior Master Gardeners, the National Gardening Association, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Life Lab Science Program.** Local groups that participated included **EEin-Georgia,** a statewide environmental education consortium.

"It was exciting to witness leaders in youth gardening in America sharing enthusiasm for their successes so selflessly

This page, top left: Symposium attendees check out a whimsical oversized watering can with rabbit ears at the Children's Garden at the Atlanta Botanical Garden (ABG); bottom left: the fountain in the Parterre Garden at ABG features a Dale Chihuly glass sculpture. Above: AHS staffers Charlotte Albers, left, and Nancy Busick, right, with, left to right, symposium attendee Jane Dicus and featured speaker Sharon Lovejoy. Opposite page, top: Wonderland Gardens founder Sheldon Fleming recounts the garden's history to the symposium group.

TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT: CHARLOTTE ALBERS; TOP RIGHT: JESSICA ROZMUS

Symposium 2005

and inspiration in Atlanta this July. Here are the highlights.

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and so powerfully," says AHS President **Katy Moss Warner**. "There are so many great programs throughout America, and so many inspired leaders. It was a proud moment for the AHS."

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Keynote speakers Sharon Lovejoy, **Tim O'Keefe**, and **Marcia Eames-Sheavly** are involved in very different aspects of youth gardening, but their experience and insight offer universal lessons.

Lovejoy, an award-winning author and illustrator of garden books, focused on the benefits young people receive from experiences with nature. She spoke about the calming, restorative aspects of natural experiences for children suffering from ADHD and other maladies. She advocated for un-designed areas that allow children to explore, noting that American children in 1981 had, on average, 100 minutes per week of unstructured play and discovery compared to 50 minutes in 2005. "Children need dream time," said Lovejoy. "They need wild places and un-designed areas: a spot for the wild things."

In his address, O'Keefe shared stories, videos, and classroom strategies that he has successfully used to get children to make connections with the natural world. A second-grade teacher at the Center for Inquiry in Columbia, South Carolina, O'Keefe and his classroom projects have been featured in professional development videos. He also discussed how to encourage budding biologists and botanists to develop authentic scientific methods as they explore their subject matter.

Marcia Eames-Sheavly, recipient of the 2005 AHS Jane L. Taylor Award for her work as an Extension educator at Cornell University, addressed how garden-based educational programs can be designed to integrate critical life lessons and developmental skills that children and young people really need. Among the most important components of any curriculum, she said, are lessons that give children a sense of belonging, make them feel they are successful, demonstrate they can influence people and events, show them the value of helping others, and are fun and at the same time physically and intellectually stimulating.

EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS

Diverse educational presentations and hands-on workshops during the symposium ranged from the study of medicinal plants to instructions on how to make a class herbarium for plant research, and lessons about the ruby-throated hummingbird.

This year's symposium was particularly rich in presentations relating to the

YGS Posters Available

A limited number of the full-color symposium posters featuring a charming illustration by Sharon Lovejoy are still available. The 11-by-14-inch poster—signed by the artist and suitable for framing—can be purchased for $10 plus $2 for shipping and handling. To order, call (703) 768-5700 ext. 121.

Students at Cedar Shoals High School in Atlanta pull up weeds and apply mulch in their rain garden, which is planted with moisture-loving trees, shrubs, and perennials in a spiral design inspired by a mathematical concept known as the Fibonacci number sequence.

creation of outdoor classrooms or school gardens that allow children to explore the idea of habitats, or interconnected natural systems. Among the creative projects profiled was one on creating a rain garden and another that addressed turning an inner courtyard into an outdoor classroom.

At Cedar Shoals High School in Athens, Georgia, construction left a major eyesore in the form of a large detention pond. "It was an ugly mudpit," notes landscape architect **Ann English**, who used the site as a field study assignment for undergraduate students in a landscape design class she taught at the University of Georgia.

English engaged her class in assessing what kind of garden would appeal to the high school students. Based on that feedback, the final design created by English and colleague Lauren Zeichner was centered on a spiral planting of trees that tolerate "wet feet," including bald cypress *(Taxodium distichum),* water tupelo *(Nyssa aquatica),* and river birch *(Betula nigra).* The design was inspired by the Fibonacci number sequence, a mathematical relationship that has been observed in many natural phenomena, including the spiraling shape of shells and the arrangement of scales on pine cones.

When work began last year, students wore hip boots to dig plants into the heavy clay soil and shovel mulch.

In addition to the trees, students planted moisture tolerant shrubs and perennials such as red chokeberry *(Aronia arbutifolia),* Virginia sweetspire *(Itea virginica),* and swamp milkweed *(Asclepias incarnata* 'Ice

ANN ENGLISH

GARDEN EXPLORATIONS

Splashing fountains were a welcome sight at the entrance to the Children's Garden at the Atlanta Botanical Garden (ABG). Symposium attendees toured the lushly planted two-acre garden and engaged in a question and answer session with **Cindy Tyler**, a principal with Marshall•Tyler•Rausch Landscape Architects, and **Tracy McLendon**, ABG's education director. A special garden railway exhibit—Locomotion in the Garden—set up outside the Fuqua Conservatory, delighted guests before a banquet dinner that featured opening remarks from ABG Executive Director **Mary Pat Masterson**, AHS President **Katy Moss Warner**, and AHS Board Chair **Arabella Dane**. The highlight of the evening was the debut of the "Growing Good Kids—Excellence in Children's Literature" awards (see page 11 for more on the book awards).

At nearby Wonderland Gardens, Columbia High School students and **Sheldon Fleming**, the garden's founder and executive director, gave tours of the community garden complex, which includes a butterfly meadow and pond used for nature study. The student guides, who volunteer at the garden during the year, addressed ecological issues like composting organic waste and recycling post-consumer plastic and rubber.

Left: A student from Columbia High School uses a magnifying glass to show a symposium attendee the diversity of life in a sample of pond water at Wonderland Gardens. Above: A group takes an optional tour of Callaway Gardens.

An optional field trip to Callaway Gardens in nearby Pine Mountain offered an opportunity to learn about *Lepidoptera* in the Cecil B. Day Butterfly Center conservatory, where hundreds of exotic tropical insects fluttered amid languid blooms and cut-fruit feeding stations. Program staff also guided guests through the John A. Sibley Horticultural Center, Mr. Cason's Vegetable Garden, and Virginia Hand Callaway Discovery Center, where a final dinner brought the symposium to a close. —C.A.

Ballet')—all tough plants that can take periodic flooding.

Now one year old, the Cedar Shoals Rain Garden has begun to attract wildlife. **Stella Guerrero**, a teacher at Cedar Shoals, uses the garden and surrounding landscape to help students understand basic botany in conjunction with an interactive Web site *(www.discoverlife.org)*.

Janet MacNeil, a parent at Glover Elementary School in Milton, Massachusetts, shared the process of transforming an empty inner courtyard into an outdoor classroom. The design for this project was developed by **Ruth Parnall** and **Virginia Sullivan**, consultants with Learning by the Yard, a landscape design company specializing in school projects. After the design was presented to students and staff in 2003, a Giving Tree in the school lobby was hung with cards listing items the project team needed to get growing. Families made donations to the courtyard garden and helped build raised planters, install birdfeeders, and water newly planted shrubs and trees.

Parnall and Sullivan studied the microclimates within the courtyard and designed the large space to include a wildflower meadow, hilltop grove with log benches, an arbor, a farm garden for growing pumpkins, a woodland edge habitat, and a clearing for large group gatherings. "The courtyard will function as a field laboratory for the school community," says Sullivan. "The structure illustrates the ecology of native plant communities and provides valuable wildlife habitat."

The success of the Glover Elementary School project has led to an initiative to create outdoor learning environments at all the public schools in Milton.

"Encouraging young people to have frequent and positive interactions with gardens and the natural world is so important that good ideas and successful lesson plans like these should be shared as widely as possible," says **Stephanie Jutila**, AHS Education Programs Manager.

Charlotte Albers is coordinator of AHS's The Growing Connection *program.*

ST. LOUIS will provide the backdrop for the 14th annual symposium, hosted by the Missouri Botanical Garden (MOBOT) July 27 to 29, 2006. Highlights include a guided tour of the new children's garden that the MOBOT is unveiling next spring. Look for more details soon at *www.ahs.org.*

LEFT: CHARLOTTE ALBERS; RIGHT: NANCY BUSICK