

## 2006 AHS NATIONAL CHILDREN & YOUTH GARDEN SYMPOSIUM

### New Children's Garden at Missouri Botanical Garden

by Linda McIntyre



**T**HE MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN (MBG) in St. Louis is renowned internationally for its botanical and plant conservation research programs, but its leadership is also committed to keeping the garden accessible to both adult visitors and the next generation of horticultural enthusiasts. Promoting appreciation of the environment, history, and outdoor life will be especially easy and fun now that the Doris I. Schnuck Children's Garden: A Missouri Adventure has opened at MBG.

The Children's Garden, made possible by a donation from the children of the **Donald Schnuck** family in honor of their mother, brings 19th-century Missouri history and botany to life on nearly two acres designed for hands-on exploration and learning. Its central themes of discovery, adventure, botany, and settlement are played out along four paths, each providing a unique garden journey in a landscape that highlights all of the ecosystems native to the state, from swamp to prairie.

The garden was designed for particular appeal to children ages two to 12, with

an emphasis on ages four to 10. But all generations are enjoying the new garden as they explore it together.

"The exhibits really encourage inter-generational interaction," says **Katie Belisle-Iffrig**, manager of the Children's Garden. "They use a lot of props and ar-

The Missouri Botanical Garden's new children's garden will be a featured tour this summer during the AHS National Children & Youth Garden Symposium.

tifacts donated by the community that promote a sense of belonging and trigger memories that older visitors share with younger ones. Even younger adults, in their 30s, have found themselves reminiscing about their own childhoods."

Plants, almost all of them Missouri natives, are central to each of the garden pathways. Visiting kids can wander along a boardwalk through a canopy of Osage orange trees (*Maclura pomifera*) planted over 100 years ago by MBG founder Henry Shaw. The adjacent Botanist's Path also features a Secret Garden and a Polli-



Opposite: Visitors play on the grounded steamboat along the Adventurer's Path. Above: MBG President Peter Raven with Rachel Downing, winner of the mascot-naming contest, and Children's Garden mascot, Finn. Right: Children cross one of the garden's two rope bridges on the Discoverer's Path.

nation Garden with colorful flowers that attract birds, bees, and butterflies. Smooth hydrangeas (*Hydrangea arborescens*) light up the Woodland Garden at the edge of the Adventurer's Path. Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) grows along the Settler's Path, a country road with a covered bridge, a farm wagon, and climbing rock. A variety of native wetland plants grow in the pond viewed from the Discoverer's Path.

Invasive plants such as purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and kudzu (*Pueraria montana* var. *lobata*) grow under lock and key in a plant "jail."

Outside the jail, endangered Missouri natives grow in a family plot, identified by headstones. Among these are the eastern fringed prairie orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*), and running buffalo clover (*Trifolium stoloniferum*).

The Children's Garden will provide an engaging and thought-provoking backdrop for the 2006 AHS National Children & Youth Garden Symposium, "Cultivating a Sense of Place: A Youth Gardening Adventure," which will be hosted by MBG July 27 to 29. After an



opening address by MBG President Peter Raven, this year's event will feature keynote presentations by **Richard Louv**, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, and **Caroline Lewis**, director of education at the Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden in Coral Gables, Florida. **Norm Lownds** of Michigan State University, chairman of the AHS's National Children & Youth Garden Symposium Advisory Panel, will moderate a discussion of Louv's book. Participants will also choose from a roster of education sessions and enjoy special exhibits at MBG and a visit to the Shaw Nature Reserve.

For more information about the symposium and to register to attend, visit the AHS website ([www.ahs.org](http://www.ahs.org)) or e-mail [youthprograms@ahs.org](mailto:youthprograms@ahs.org).

Linda McIntyre is editorial intern for The American Gardener.



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