

2007 AHS NATIONAL CHILDREN & YOUTH GARDEN SYMPOSIUM

The University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum: Celebrating Children

by Courtney Capstack

THE UNIVERSITY OF Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chaska, Minnesota, the host site for the AHS 2007 Children & Youth Garden Symposium, not only is a haven for researchers, plant aficionados, and outdoor enthusiasts, but is also an inviting classroom filled with opportunities for enriching children's minds and allowing them to connect with nature.

Containing more than 1,000 acres of landscaped gardens, prairie, and wetlands, the arboretum is the largest public garden in the upper Midwest. It offers an extensive variety of activities for children, educators, and families, making the arboretum an ideal setting for the American Horticultural Society's 15th annual National Children & Youth Garden Symposium from July 19 to 21. "The land of 10,000 lakes has a long history of engaging people of all ages and traditions in the outdoors," says AHS Education Programs Manager **Stephanie Jutila**. "Bringing the Symposium to Minnesota is an excellent opportunity to highlight the many innovative programs across the state that engage children and youth in gardening."

THE GARDEN AS CLASSROOM

More than 45,000 children participated in programs offered by the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum last school year. Students explored the environment through various field trips, teacher-led adventures, and a traveling "Plantmobile." The arboretum's children's programs have also garnered numerous awards, including the award for Program Excellence in 1993 from the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (now the



American Public Gardens Association), and the Minnesota Science Teachers Association Contributions to Elementary Science in Minnesota in 2001.

"With the level of classroom-structured education increasing over the years, the potential is even greater for children to become more disconnected from the

Above: Participants of the Urban Outreach Summer Garden Program in Minneapolis celebrate their hard work with an End of the Season Harvest Day Celebration. Left: A young gardener carefully waters a zinnia bed in the program's south Minneapolis site.

environment," says **Tim Kenny**, the arboretum's director of education. "The role of public gardens in education is more important now than ever. As a public garden, we have an opportunity, and even a responsibility, to provide a hands-on, environmental-related learning experience outside of the classroom."

The arboretum offers 20 different field trips throughout the school year for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. Students can taste fall's bounty with the "Apple Harvest" trip through the orchard, dive into a tour of four different wetland stations at "World of Wetlands," or tap into the process of making maple syrup with "Maple Syrup Time." Other popular trips include dissecting the anatomy of plants, discovering the source of some common items on grocery lists, and investigating the ins-and-outs of pumpkins.

To cater more to the personal needs of each child, the arboretum also offers four different self-guided visits, including “Bug O’ Orienteering,” designed to give students in fifth through eighth grades the opportunity to strengthen their map-reading, navigation, and team-building skills.

Pre-school youngsters are welcome to participate in “Pea Pods Preschool” every other Wednesday morning at the arboretum’s Marion Andrus Learning Center. Seventy-one children participated in the program when it debuted in 2001. Since then, “Pea Pods Preschool” has grown to serve more than 3,600 children and parents during the 2005-2006

For more information about the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum located in Chaska, Minnesota, visit www.arboretum.umn.edu or call (952) 443-1400. Hours: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week. Admission: \$7 adults (AHS members free), children under 15 free.

school year. Each session explores a different nature-related topic, providing children with enriching experiences to share with their parents.

BUSINESS SKILLS FOR TEENAGERS

As an outgrowth of the urban garden outreach program, the arboretum also offers CityFresh, a summer program designed to give teenagers the opportunity to hone their business and entrepreneurial skills in a nature-related environment. “Our children’s programs were originally aimed at five- to 12-year-olds,” says Kenny. “We found there’s an interest among young teens who’ve enjoyed our programs for a few years and still want more.”

Originating as a program in which teens grew and sold specialty vegetables to local restaurants, CityFresh now offers six different summer work opportunities, from photography and growing cut flowers to teacher assistantships and communications. Thirty-six teenagers are split into six work teams, led by six adult leaders, many of whom once participated in the program themselves. “Being involved in programs sponsored by the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum has helped keep me out of trouble, ex-

GARDEN EXPLORATIONS: GALE WOODS FARM

Attendees of the National Children & Youth Garden Symposium will also have the opportunity to tour Gale Woods Farm, a 410-acre educational farm in Minnetrista, Minnesota. As part of the Three Rivers Park District established to encourage environmental stewardship, Gale Woods Farm offers a variety of educational opportunities designed to promote agriculture, food production, and land stewardship.

In addition to presenting farm exploratory tours and seasonal classes, Gale Woods Farm participates in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, offering 50 crop shares to the local public and youth development opportunities during the summer. More than 10,000 visitors experienced the agriculture education programs at Gale Woods Farm last year, with an additional 5,000 guests enjoying the hiking trails and interpretive displays throughout the farm.

Symposium participants will be able to take tours of the farm, attend lectures and educational programs, and learn about the CSA youth farming program before relaxing with dinner in

the picnic pavilion. Visit Gale Woods Farm’s website at www.galewoodsfarm.org or call (763) 694-2001 for additional information about the programs.

—C.C.



Young visitors to Gale Woods Farm get a chance to learn where food comes from and how to care for the land.

panded my future, and given me more motivation and confidence,” says **Elizabet Selander**, a former participant and a current program leader.

A TRAVELING CLASSROOM

If traveling away from a school is not a feasible option, the arboretum will bring the outdoors to classrooms with the Plantmobile, a one-hour, hands-on excursion in which an arboretum educator leads students through a variety of science investigations and planting projects.

Last year, more than 10,000 children in the greater Minneapolis–St. Paul area participated in the Plantmobile program. Of those students, nearly half took part in “Sunflower Supreme,” a class designed to give children through second grade an in-depth look at the diversity and environmental contributions of the popular flower. Teachers have the opportunity to choose between eight different projects, specifically tailored to the season and class age group.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Leaders of the arboretum’s children’s programs focus on two criteria to maintain success. Their programs are continually updated to meet Minnesota’s education standards, and steps are implemented to make the most popular programs accessible to children who may not have had the opportunity to participate because of economic or geographic challenges. “We have a responsibility to keep up with the changing school requirements and environment so [the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum] can continue to provide hands-on experiences with plants,” says Kenny. “What we can do to best serve children is our bottom line, and that constantly changes.”

For more information on the AHS National Children & Youth Garden Symposium this July, turn to the news article on page 9, or visit the AHS website at www.ahs.org.

Courtney Capstack is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.