



Gardening With Young Children: Expertise From UNH's Child Study Center

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Reporters and editors: Beth Hallett, Growing a Green Generation project coordinator, is available for comment at beth.hallett@unh.edu.

DURHAM, N.H. - For ten years before Malia and Sasha Obama helped make gardening a child-friendly activity, the University of New Hampshire's youngest students of agriculture have been tilling, planting and harvesting flowers and vegetables. Although these future-Future Farmers of America have not yet started elementary school, through the Growing a Green Generation project of UNH's Child Study and Development Center (CSDC) they're developing a lifelong love of learning, the outdoors, and possibly even vegetables.

"Gardening lets children practice skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, counting, measuring, writing, language, and risk-taking," says Beth Hallett, Growing a Green Generation project coordinator and an early childhood teacher at the CSDC, a laboratory school (infant through kindergarten) at UNH. "The garden is truly nature's classroom, where young children of varying abilities find a soothing environment that releases tension, engages the senses, provokes curiosity and invites interaction."

As interest in "green" living and fiscal frugality intersect to create a boom in home gardens this year, Hallett offers several tips for parents and educators wishing to bring their children into the process:

- Have children help choose the vegetables and fruits to be grown.
- Plant in container gardens to reduce the amount of weeding.
- Engage children in meaningful work such as planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting.
- Create private spaces such as a bean tipi or sunflower house.
- Talk with children about their theories and discoveries within the garden: "How do you think the beans climbed to the top of the tipi?" "Where do plants get their water?"
- Invite children to cook with you. Children are more willing to eat something they have created.

The Growing a Green Generation Project, a decade-long collaboration between the CSDC and the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture at UNH, engages infants through kindergarteners through a curriculum that actively involves them in the process of gardening. Students participate in all aspects of tending the 5400-square-foot (one-eighth of an acre) garden that abuts the center: from selecting and nurturing seedlings indoors to preparing the soil to building supports and structures to - of course - harvesting and tasting. Each year the project

hosts the Growing a Green Generation conference for educators and parents; this year's event (May 2, 2009) filled more than a month in advance.

Growing a Green Generation receives generous funding from the Anna and Raymond Tuttle Environmental Horticulture Fund. In 2008, the project received a Wuzzleburg Preschool Garden Award from the National Gardening Association. For more information, go to <http://horticulture.unh.edu/ggg.html>.

The Child Study and Development Center celebrated 80 years of early childhood education at UNH in January 2009. The center is known nationally for its inquiry-based approach to early education and its award-winning Growing a Green Generation Project on gardening with children. As a laboratory school, the CSDC provides a setting for research, educates 100 pre-service teachers, and hosts hundreds of educator tours each year. Learn more at www.csdc.unh.edu.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

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Photographs available to download:

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2009/apr/CSDC%20flowers.JPG

Caption: A toddler at the University of New Hampshire's Child Study and Development Center experiences gardening through the Growing a Green Generation project.

Credit: Courtesy of UNH Child Study and Development Center.

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2009/apr/csdcbentent.jpg

Caption: Structures like bean tipis create private spaces for children in the garden.

Credit: Courtesy of UNH Child Study and Development Center.

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2009/apr/Infant.jpg

Caption: At the University of New Hampshire's Child Study and Development Center, even the youngest children experience gardening through the Growing a Green Generation project.

Credit: Courtesy of UNH Child Study and Development Center.

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