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UNH Develops Gardening Curriculum for Young Children

By Sharon Keeler
UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- University of New Hampshire students and faculty have developed a new program to help teach young children about gardening and nature.

"Growing a Green Generation" is a series of plant activities for children ranging from preschool to elementary ages. There are a total of 42 activities in categories that include plant basics, making a garden, nature, snacks, garden themes, trips, horticultural projects (arts and crafts), games and songs.

"Most teachers would like to do gardening activities in the spring, but they may not have the background to get started," says Rosanna Freyre, assistant professor of plant biology. "This program makes it easy by providing activities that have been developed and tested with children. Each activity has clearly defined objectives and descriptions, a list of materials needed, and question that encourage learning. There is also a planning calendar for the growing season."

Paul Fisher, assistant professor of plant biology, initiated the garden project at UNH's Child Study and Development Center (CSDC) in 1999, supported by the Anna and Raymond Tuttle Horticulture Fund and StandUp Gardens Inc., of New Hampshire.

Undergraduates Laura Broderick, Tracie Smith and Maria Sorrento began the gardening activities with the children. During the summers of 2000 and 2001, Cami Esmel, an environmental horticulture student, took the lead on the project.

Using the knowledge learned in the classroom and from working in the horticulture industry, Esmel and 150 children created a garden at the CSDC. Another undergraduate student, Lenoir McDougall, also did
some activities with three- to four-year-olds.

According the Esmel, the activities and lessons came about through conversations with the children about the process of creating a garden.

"The children, for example, love to see tractors work," Esmel says. "So we did a farm trip in which we explored the tractors, but also picked strawberries and talked to UNH Woodman Farm Manager John McLean."

Esmel and Freyre agree that horticulture is a great way to teach young children about science, the environment, and where their food comes from.

"For my own experience growing up, my most favorite memories are from being in the garden with my mother growing our food," Esmel says. "We were allowed to choose a few things each year that we wanted to grown and had our own section. It made me feel important, and I could show my parents what I was accomplishing. I believe it is the same way for the children I worked with. It leaves an important impression upon them as they grow up."

"Growing a Green Generation" can be found in the teacher's resources section of the UNH Sustainable Horticulture Web site at http://horticulture.unh.edu/elementary.html. The activities can be downloaded free of charge.

A printed black and white copy is available for $4.50 from the UNH Department of Plant Biology at 603-862-3205.

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