Garden's Gate

Rutgers Gardens

Summer/Fall 2011

Directionals

Fads and fashion are certainly a motivating and fun part of our society. They often determine what we wear, the palette of colors we should choose and even the places to go on vacation. I enjoy watching my 14- year-old daughter's focus on fashion, but I am not very conscious of fashion – just ask those that work with me! However, I am greatly intrigued by long-term trends and fascinated by those 'elements' around us that subconsciously make us feel most comfortable.

Currently, one of the more disturbing trends is child obesity and the isolation of children from the natural world. Many botanical gardens, including Rutgers Gardens, are attempting to reverse this trend by teaching children to become more ecoliterate. Ecoliteracy is the process by which children once again focus on the environment, often by physically performing 'hands-on' activities in the environment. It allows children to become better stewards of that environment and of themselves. Several years back, the Gardens started an afterschool program that focuses on revealing some secrets of nature with children. We also began a Children's Community Vegetable Garden, focusing upon the benefits of a proper diet and the ease with which vegetables can be grown at home. This summer these two programs were expanded into a one-week summer camp. Under the guidance of Debbie Henry and the tireless efforts of K.C. Murray, our student intern dedicated to this project, the camp was a huge success. Having wrestled with three children of my own to eat and appreciate fresh vegetables, it was not only refreshing to watch the children harvest and eat produce from the garden, but startling to hear them ask for more! The same was true of their studies of fresh water ecosystems, animal and insect habitats or simply the study of a tree as they clambered over and upon the lower branches. Ecoliteracy is not a fashion, but a positive trend that not only pulls children back out into nature, but focuses their attention on how to preserve and appreciate the natural world.

Education about gardens is a trend that all botanical gardens have long focused upon, and the Gardens are no different, whether for the public or for undergraduate students. I am certain that many folks have noticed the metal 'dog tags' that are appearing throughout the Gardens. Thanks to a generous gift from a donor, a much needed plant accessioning system has been established and is being run by Emma Van de Water, a student intern. Plants in the Gardens are entered into a database and a tag relaying some of the associated plant information is placed on or near the plant for all to read. This summer we also conducted a two-day 'pilot' project with Central Park in which the interns not only learned about the park, but also shadowed their gardeners for a day. The ultimate aim is the creation of a two-year program in which students learn the basics of Public Garden Management at Rutgers Gardens during the first summer, and enhance that education the following summer at Central Park. The budget, focus and concerns of a Park that receives 38 million visits annually are vastly different than a Garden that receives 25,000 visits! One of the hurdles for this program is offsetting the cost of travel to New York from New Brunswick, such that it is not a major financial burden for students. The Gardens has a small endowment established that can offset some of this cost, but it will need to grow! For me, the visit provided an opportunity to study which portions of the Park are used the most and subconsciously feel most comfortable to the visitors. Although Rutgers Gardens certainly lacks the scale of Central Park, various views and settings that proved successful could be replicated on a smaller scale. On the flipside, those areas that proved least used by visitors could be avoided. As we know all too well, fashions change with the seasons, but trends continue and evolve far into the future. My hope is that you will not only continue to visit and enjoy the Gardens, but you will help us refine and develop these trends! After all, the future of the Gardens is best shaped by those that most enjoy the Gardens!

Student Intern News

Plant Records Management - Emma Van de Water

Due to a generous donation, the Gardens was able to purchase a new computer database software called BG-Base. BG-Base was created in 1985 to help botanic gardens curate their plant collections. It is now the premiere curatorial software for both private and public plant collections around the world. By using this software, the Gardens will be able to merge our paper and computer records into a single electronic database. This will enable us to quickly pull up all of the information we have on any given plant, including when and where we acquired the plant, its planting history, location in the Gardens, geographic origin, photographs, reference citations, and more.

In order to keep track of individual plants or groups of plants, each plant or grouping is assigned an accession number based on when it was added to our collections. Once the plant has been added to our database, it is given a small aluminum label that lists the accession number, scientific and common names, and geographic origin. You may have seen some of these labels hanging on metal stakes in the Gardens. These small aluminum labels are what allow us to link a plant with a specific record and are critical to keeping the plant's identification accurate. As resources allow, we will get larger display labels that can be comfortably viewed from a few feet away.

Rutgers Gardens is a valuable resource for the members of the Rutgers community, but that value is greatly limited by the accessibility of accurate information. BG-Base will give unprecedented access to current information on the plant collections at Rutgers Gardens – information that can be used for education, research, and conservation. Data can also be more easily shared with other botanic gardens that use BG-Base. Eventually, we will make a read-only version of the database available on our website. This will allow visitors to find the precise location of and information we have on specific plants. Visitors will be able to search for plants using many different categories, such as plant family, growth habit, or light conditions.

Researching and entering all of this information takes time and dedication. We need your support to continue this massive undertaking. The Gardens hopes to purchase some handheld devices in the near future that will allow staff and volunteers to track the growth habit, size, health, bloom time, and other data about specific plants directly in the field.

Children's Programs - Kenneth C. Murray

While interning at Rutgers Gardens this summer, I had the chance to grow and maintain an organic vegetable garden, and educate children about sustainable agriculture. With the Children's Program, I had the pleasure of introducing youth to organic gardening. Working with the Children's Program Coordinator, Debbie Henry, we used the on-site organic vegetable garden as our classroom to educate children about the farming process. On a daily basis, we ran children's tours around the gardens, showing them the various crops and describing the harvesting process. We also had the opportunity to conduct the first Rutgers Gardens summer camp. This week of exploration and education introduced children to different topics such as propagation techniques, pollution, pollination, biodiversity, and organic gardening.

Due to the nature of my work, I had time to reflect on the importance of farming,

and to recognize how out of touch I had been with the process. I used to take for granted the production and process that precedes food's presence in the supermarkets. Introduce children to the agricultural experience by actively engaging in vegetable gardening has been one of our highest goals.

I asked a group of kids one day, "What are your clothes made of?" They responded, "Cotton." "Well, where does cotton come from?" I asked. They replied, "Sheep, of course!" They were astonished to realize that cotton came from a plant that I would show them seconds later. The children's groups that visited were primarily children who live in very urban and densely populated areas, such as New Brunswick and Newark. I was able to teach them techniques for growing vegetables with virtually no traditional gardening spaces available (i.e., by using raised beds and planters), thereby inspiring them to grow their own food! The only way to really understand and appreciate something is to get excited about it. And the only way to get excited about something is to experience it firsthand. That is why our children's program really pushes for kids to literally get their hands dirty, and take part in every aspect of growing an organic vegetable garden. The only thing more exciting than picking dozens of potatoes, carrots, and radishes hidden beneath the ground is being able to take them home, and cook a meal!

This internship has taught me the importance of community. Organic gardening is just one part of a larger picture. It is not just about collecting a bountiful harvest; rather, it is the integration of working within a community in order to meet our challenges. I had the opportunity to see the epitome of this concept. Once a week, I brought a portion of our harvest to the Better World Café in Highland Park, where they cook and sell the food on location. Upholding their values of outreach and fairness, the Better World Café implements a system whereby patrons can choose to pay full price for a meal, volunteer their time in exchange for a meal, or even pay a little extra to offset the price for other patrons who may not be able to pay the full price. Farmers in the area have become attracted to this concept and continue to donate portions of their harvests to this locally grown menu. The recognition of a farm-to-table system has become a distant concept in modern eating, but one emphasized through the youth programs at Rutgers Gardens.

Rutgers Gardens Children's Programs - Summer 2011

Debbie Henry, Children's Program Coordinator

Through our group tours and exploration camps held this spring and summer, more than 950 children experienced the bounty of the Gardens and learned something new about having fun in nature.

In addition to the many tour groups who came for 1-2 hour visits, we had several groups of children who came to the gardens for longer periods of time. This year, for the first time, we offered a one-week day camp for kids aged 8-12. The camp was a great success and the children and staff all had a fun and educational experience. We also hosted two camp groups who asked to come to the gardens to expand their outdoor experiences. These programs gave over 50 children a chance to explore the Gardens in more depth and to broaden their experience through activities and projects.

Many thanks go to the Gardens' volunteers, Rutgers faculty, staff and students, and community professionals who put together programs, ran projects and joined our explorations, helping to make the camp and tours an even richer experience for the children. I especially want to thank my intern, K.C. Murray, whose great enthusiasm, talents and kindness were a big part of making the Summer 2011 Children's Programs a success.

Garden's Gate

Rutgers Gardens

Summer/Fall 2011

Please Help the Gardens Grow!

Rutgers Gardens has continued to grow with support from friends like you. Help us to continue with our plans to add new programs and features to the Gardens in the coming years. Please consider donating by becoming a Gardens member or helping us to reach our goal for the Doc and Ellen Hamilton Internship Enrichment Fund. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Name_____Address_____

_____Yes, I would like to donate to the Doc and Ellen Hamilton Internship Enrichment Fund in the amount of $_____. Please make checks payable to the Rutgers University Foundation or fill in your credit card information below.

_____Yes, I would like to become a member of Rutgers Gardens as:

___ Friend $40.00 ___Family $65.00 ___ Educator $55.00 ___ Sponsor $150.00 ___ Benefactor $500.00

Credit card number_____Exp Date_____3 Digit security Code____ Signature_____

Checks should be made payable to Rutgers Gardens. Thank you for your support!

RUTGERS Gardens

Rutgers Gardens
School of Environmental and Biological Sciences
112 Ryders Lane
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
www.rutgersgardens.rutgers.edu