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Lower Cape Children's Garden: Pure Magic

by Myka-Lynne Sokoloff

A magic garden grows in Brewster, tended by elves and giants. These elves take the shape of human children. And just who are those jolly green giants? Master Gardeners, who are all volunteers, trained and certified by Barnstable County's Cape Cod Cooperative Extension office.

In its third season, the Lower Cape Children's Garden is a serene, productive oasis hidden away off Lower Road in Brewster, on land preserved by the Brewster Conservation Trust. The land, donated by sisters Ruth and Mary Louise Eddy, long ago served as the planting fields of the Saquatuckets.



Working with a Master Gardner Mentor Victoria & Grandmother /Mentor Connie Gans

Each child tends his or her own plot, and is paired one-to-one with a Master Gardener mentor. The children determine which flowers and vegetables they will plant. Choices range from arugula to zinnias, and everything in between. This year's bounty has included stunning Savoy cabbages, scarlet runner beans, Brussels sprouts, sky-high sunflowers, and purple carrots, among many other offerings.

Children take home the fruits of their labor to share with their families. Excess vegetables from the plots and "Plant a Row for the Hungry" plots maintained by the Master Gardeners are donated to local food pantries.

The gardeners meet each Tuesday afternoon from mid May through mid September. Each weekly gardening session begins with a group mini-lesson designed to teach sustainable gardening practices.

These brief hands-on lessons include a visit to an organic farm, and topics such as honeybees, a release of 5,000 ladybugs, composting, soil composition, flower arranging, scarecrow building, annuals and perennials. One session even includes a taste test of recipes the children prepared at home from produce they grew.



Planting runner beans.

In addition to tending their own plots, children also share labors such as planting, weeding, and watering in a community area in which larger crops including corn, pumpkins, gourds, berries and watermelons are grown.



Luke picks peas.

There is no charge for children to participate in the garden. The program is funded in part by the Master Gardeners Association of Cape Cod and Cooperative Extension of Cape Cod. Organizations including the Cape Cod Foundation and the Karl Rausch Memorial Fund, among others, also provide funds for tools and materials.



A new generation of Green Thumbs Entomologist Dave Simser and helpers release ladybugs.

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Who can apply for the 2010 Garden?

Children who will be entering grades 3 through 6 the following Fall are eligible.

Space at the Lower Cape Children's Garden is limited to about a dozen children each gardening season.

Applications for next summer's program will be available in March 2010 at www.capecodextension.org

Or call for more details: 508-375-6697

Myka-Lynne Sokoloff is a writer of children's books & educational materials, as well as a jolly green giant at the Lower Cape Children's garden.

She lives in Brewster with her husband and a pitbull who just adores vegetables.

Myka-Lynne Sokoloff
Curriculum & Assessment
962 Stoney Brook Road
Brewster, MA 02631
Office 508.896.2427



Taking home the bounty Max & zucchini - too much of a good thing?