

CHAT ROOM



SUSAN MEINKE

Kids need to get back to nature

Amid the growing clamor for educational reform, perhaps the strongest evidence of the need for change is often overlooked — our gradual estrangement from nature and the ecological crisis we face. As we scramble to raise our consciousness and our conscience about the earth, we need to remember that our greatest teacher is experience.

Gardening with children is the answer that lies at our feet. The effort in life our children can learn about the science and beauty of nature through doing, the brighter their future will be. In the garden, children learn to care for a seamless whole, discovering the subtle, varied and many relationships that make up life. Every subject in school has a ready-made dynamic laboratory in the garden and with each comes larger dimensions of responsibility such as diligence, interest, self esteem and creativity.

Garden variety

Gardens provide a safe haven — they revitalize the neighborhood providing interaction and social camaraderie. People become more self reliant, breaking down the isolation of people who fear everyone around them. They provide apartment dwellers a place to work the soil and gain a source for home grown fresher tasting produce. Everyone can come together, trading vegetables, recipes, and seeds sown from heirloom varieties. People like to grow plants with biodiversity based on their unique ethnic background. Simple in operation, youths can set up work with a heartfelt connection to the land. This channels their free time for safe outdoor play, social interaction and also preserves their cultural roots. In tending the garden, the elders impart their wisdom of garden lore and older children buddy up with the youngest, feeling pride and joy.

Plants respond in a non discriminative way to the caring hands of people regardless of their appearance or beliefs. Gardens provide a non threatening oasis to those tending them, bonding all who work together. A community garden inspires residents in surrounding neighborhoods to plant individual gardens and flower beds to brighten the entire community. Even the youngest gardeners understand the need to be gentle when placing seedlings in the ground and patting down the soil. They come to understand that flowers attract beneficial insects and how to hand-weed their personal patches. These gardening angels, the children, the elders, all till the soil collectively, can then take their crops to needy families, churches, soup kitchens and food pantries if desired.

Artichokes to zucchini

Fledgling farmers can be given affordable leases for land and equipment to get them started. In this outdoor classroom, the syllabus runs from artichokes to zucchini. Raised beds offer minimal stooping, they drain freely, and warm quickly each spring.

The soil is not compacted down lacking footsteps bearing down. Earliness can be emphasized as well as lateness in offerings. Too many gardeners shut down with the first frost. Pillars of brussel sprouts are available in fall; young leeks become the first harvest next spring. No pesticides compromise the songbird's existence. Community gardens are life sustaining and connect us all in the great web of life.

With Farmington's proud agrarian tradition of Indian dwellers and colonial settlers demonstrating the principles responsible agriculture, we can reinforce the joy and fulfillment of connecting to the land.

Susan Meinke of The Trehouse For Earth's Children, is a member of Farmington Naturalists, Wayne County organic gardeners, Michigan Food and Farm Alliance, Natural Landscaping Club and Grow - The American Community Garden Association. For more information on creating a community garden, call (248) 473-0624.

By RUTH MOEHLMAN
SPECIAL WRITER

One of the gems of the Farmington Hills Historic District is the John Dallas Harger House on 12 Mile Road.

The house was owned by five generations of Hargers. It is unique because it's a Greek Revival building built of split stone. The building is also unusual because of the efforts of Farmington historian Jean Fox to save the house from destruction.

In 1832, John Dallas Harger of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., married Ellen Slade. The following year the young couple purchased an old homestead in Michigan.

Three years later the Hargers bought a 120-acre farm on what is today Halsted Road near Grand River. They built a Greek Revival stone house. The farm was named Briar Mill. There John D. Harger lived for 58 years. On the farm there were barns and a chicken house. There was once an orchard and sugar maple trees. Maple sugar was harvested along with other crops.

The Hargers had two children who lived to adulthood, Oscar and Maria. Eliza Harger died in 1870. John D. and Eliza's daughter, Maria, died in 1880. John was known in the neighborhood as Uncle Johnnie D. He did extensive charity work for the needy.

He remarried in 1884 to Susan Midgah of New York. Son Oscar Harger was active in local politics. He was supervisor of Farmington Township in 1871 and served as Oakland County sheriff.

Transfer to son

The property on John D. Harger's death in 1894 went to son Oscar Harger. Oscar and Annie Harger's son John Jr. attended the University of Michigan Law School and lived in Grosse Pointe. He practiced law in Detroit. When he died he was buried in the North Farmington cemetery.

His sister Lizzie Harger Orvis lived in Northville and later Los Angeles, Calif. In 1952, the property was sold out of the family to Helen Sucker. The property had been rented out for a long



Historic gem: The John Dallas Harger house on 12 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

period of time. The family who lived in the stone house from 1937 to 1952 were William and Marie White and a family of 13 children. They farmed the 120 acres.

When the Whites lived on the farm there was no central heating in the house and no indoor plumbing, according to an interview in 1990 with Helen White Kirby and her brother Howard White. The house was heated with stoves that burned the old nonproductive sugar maple wood from the property.

The stoves went out at night even if the temperature was below zero. Each morning William White would start the stoves for the household. The seven boys slept upstairs in the house. The children attended the one-room Fairview school on Grand River. After the eighth grade, they went to Farmington High School.

Amenities circa 1937

On the farm there was a telephone and electricity by 1937. William White had a dairy herd. The children helped with the milking and the milk went to the Warner Dairy. The milk money helped pay the rent.

They also had five horses, according to Howard White. In addition to farming, William White was township treasurer. This meant that he took his machinery over the six square mile township at harvest time threshing the grain. He also had a baler for hay and a corn husker.

In Farmington Township at the time farmers grew oats, corn, wheat and potatoes. William White also built silos. His son Howard became a carpenter.

When land developers purchased the property in 1972, the Hunt Club subdivision did not appreciate the unique

stone Greek Revival building.

Historian Jean Fox, who later served as Farmington Hills mayor, received help from Donald McCluskey, owner of a local insurance agency, to save the building. The McCluskeys found the Harger House perfect for their office.

The stones were removed one by one and numbered. The house on its hand-cut timbers was moved, restored and listed as an historic building in 1994. The house stands proudly on 12 Mile Road, a work of art and an example of unique Greek Revival architecture.

The McCluskey agency is now operated by Don's son and has moved to Novi. Donald McCluskey has retired, but the Harger House is restored and well cared for, thanks to the efforts of people who cared.

Ruth Moehlman is a local author and historian.

Scottish fiddle champ plays Art on the Grand

Jeremy Kittel, the 2000 U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Champion; the 1998 and 1999 U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Junior Champion; and winner of both the Irish Fiddle and Slow Airs competitions at the 1999 Midwest North American Fleadh, will be playing at the Art On The Grand section of the annual Founders Festival today through Saturday in downtown Farmington.

A jazz major at the University of Michigan, Kittel has played in the White House, at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor, and for many outdoor audiences. He performs an eclectic mix of slow airs and lively jigs and reels. His favorite is Celtic, but he also plays classical, jazz, old-time and bluegrass.

An accomplished pianist who studied composition at Interlochen Arts Camp, Jesse Mason, on guitar, is an equally talented and versatile musician. A music major at Eastern Michigan University, he has played in groups varying

from bluegrass to classical.

Last year Kittel recorded Celtic Fiddle, a CD of traditional and original Scottish, Irish and Cape Breton tunes. Current magazine said, "His album showcases his talent in a well chosen series of tunes, including 'Tamlin' and 'Well My Charlie Wear the Crown.'" Celtic Fiddle has been broadcast on the syndicated radio show Celtic Connections. The Folk Tradition, many area radio stations and soon on The Thistle & Shamrock.

Kittel and Mason are performing twice during the festival: from 5-7 p.m. on Thursday, July 19, and from 7-9 p.m. on Friday, July 20. They will be on stage in Memorial Park, located just west of the Masonic Temple at the corner of Farmington Road and Grand River.

For more information on Art On The Grand, call the Farmington Hills Cultural Arts division at (248) 473-1856.



Fiddlers: Jeremy Kittel on violin with Jesse Mason on guitar will be appearing in a new feature of the Farmington Founders Festival, Art on the Grand. Live music will be interspersed with juried artwork and hands-on activities for children.

St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher residents groove with NSync



Concert bound: Sixteen girls from the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center in Farmington Hills were guests of Verizon Wireless at the NSync concert June 30. Verizon contacted FOX2 News Problem Solvers to invite more than 40 metro Detroit children to attend the concert. Rebecca Moss, a spokeswoman for the center, said the girls have had many disappointments in their lives and it was wonderful to see something good happen to them. Limousines for the night were donated by AAA Extreme Limousine Service. In addition, each girl received a poster of the band. The center serves more than 1,000 children each year through residential treatment, outreach and adoptive care services.