Back to School & into the Garden!
Using the Garden as an Alternative Learning Space


Lewisdale Elementary School in Hyatsville, MD has done a commendable job transitioning to an outdoor learning space. Their garden has been seamlessly integrated into their math, literature, and science curricula. NAMI 2014 participant Wendy Rouget's students say, "the outdoor learning center is their favorite place in the school." Lessons in any outdoor learning space engage students in observation and inquiry that will transfer into life-long critical thinking skills and appreciation for the outdoors. Lewisdale Elementary is a premiere example for garden teaching, impacting over 250 students in their outdoor classroom. Here are some great lesson ideas to get students learning outside:

- Seed Collection and Storage (Learn more...)

Featured Story: Julie Frey

Above: Trinity Valley Middle School teacher, Julie Frey. Photo: Weatherford Democrat, 2014

Congratulations NAMI 2014 participant Julie Frey! Julie's monarch expertise and dedication to conservation caught the attention of her local Texas newspaper. Julie is a great example of the NAMI community at work, as she is active in educating citizens about monarch conservation and is even tagging monarchs herself as a citizen scientist! Read the...
Weed without worrying about pulling up seedlings  
Practice plant identification, have students adopt-a-plant, or make a garden map (Learn more...)  
Choosing a garden site, site evaluation, and soil nutrient testing (Learn more...)  
Plant labeling and an introduction into taxonomy (Learn more...)  

For some of us, the cold temperatures of winter may just be around the corner. Still, fall is one of the best times for students to explore in their outdoor learning space. Using the garden as a teaching tool when school resumes is an excellent way to familiarize students with the garden and stimulate their interest in spring gardening, as well as the upcoming school year.

Now Accepting Garden Grant Applications

Above: A Garden Grant product at Fernbank Science Center in Atlanta, GA. Fernbank is a great success story and has a beautiful garden; complete with a sign welcoming monarchs! Photo: NAMI participant Trecia Neal, 2014.

Garden Grant submissions are now being accepted by the Monarch Lab. Garden Grants give any school or institution the ability to install a new garden to be used as an interactive outdoor learning space. Not only will the garden bolster student interaction with nature, it will also foster a connection to the community, allowing parents and neighbors to be involved in maintaining and enjoying the garden.

Do you have great a great garden success story? We would article here.

How do you Reuse in the Garden?

Do you have any creative methods for recycling ordinary materials into resources for enhancing your garden? Share any ideas or pictures with the NAMI community! Email Sarah at weave048@umn.edu

love to hear about it and feature your garden and school/institution in an upcoming NAMI newsletter! It is inspiring when a NAMI participant has success, and we want to inspire your peers and colleagues! Email any Garden Grant success stories (with pictures if possible) to Dane Elmquist at ggrants@umn.edu.

Fall Migration - How do they do it?

It has been a brighter summer than past for the resilient monarch butterfly. The Monarch Larva Monitoring Project data from summer 2014 has been positive, showing healthy reproductive patterns that hopefully will lead to a slight increase in the overwintering population this year. However, before the overwintering population is quantified, monarchs still need to soar to the mountains of Michoacán, Mexico. For an insect that weighs as much as a paper clip, this 2,500+ mile migration is nothing short of epic. So, exactly how does this flagship species travel to Mexico year after year? This engaging article will explore some of the questions behind one of natures most fascinating migrations.

Life-Cycle Wheel Lesson
This is an updated version of Lesson 7: Making Life-Cycle Picture Cards and Books (pg 69 in K-2). Teachers will find improved graphics and vocabulary to go along with the life-cycle wheel. Contact Sarah Weaver at weave048@umn.edu for any questions regarding curriculum or lesson applicability.

Life-cycle Wheel Lesson (K-2)
Life-cycle Wheel Lesson (3-6)
Making Life-cycle Books (K-2)
(Article by Candy Sarikonda, Monarch Joint Venture 9/25/14)

The Impact of Taking Kids Outside
By: Katie-Lyn Bunney

Science is so fascinating—how do you find time to create authentic science experiences for students? There are group dynamics to navigate, science to teach, and questions you may not know the answers to. This is a challenge you’ve all risen to! The North American Monarch Institute not only cultivates a love and inspiration for science (centered around monarchs, of course), it also fosters a love and appreciation for nature as well. As educators you are both the facilitators and front seat spectators to meaningful experiences with nature.

We know there is a LOT of competition with nature these days: technology (computers, video games, TV); more buildings, cars and roads; fear of strangers; parental attitude; administration attitude; mandated curriculum; fear of pests. The list could go on forever. For kids, boundaries are smaller, and the freedom to roam is diminished.

People have always had a fear of the unknown, and
throughout history nature has often been included in that. The difference now is that collectively as a society we know more about what’s out in nature, but when we get down to the individual level the understanding isn't always there. This is where the fear creeps in.

During my time as a naturalist and informal educator I observed fear of pests (among other things) first hand. Kids who screamed at the sight of a frog, parents who wouldn’t let their children even get near the education animals. But I will never forget the mother who asked me if her children “could catch ticks” from being in the long grass where we were building our fort (having fun!). When I told her it was possible, but not likely as ticks were long past their peak, she wanted immediately to take her kids home and away from the fun they were having. I did not mention to her that it was also possible to “catch ticks” in her backyard…

I do not discount the fears and worries of parents – our world is a dangerous place! Or, at least it can be if we’re not careful. One of the great things about NAMI is that it provides educators with more tools to pass on to youth; knowledge and tools needed to navigate through a number of those fears and dangers. And it encourages educators to do this in a way that empowers their students instead of doing all the work for them. In my opinion, spending time in nature is a huge part of the way humans learn. It is a way for children to gain confidence, build coordination skills, test the physical capabilities of their own boundaries, and learn what is acceptable socially.

It has been so wonderful watching all of this happening through the stories I hear about how you've taken NAMI back to your students and communities. One of my greatest pleasures in working with this project is seeing the impact it has had on the children, adults, and families you all work with. Whatever your students end up doing with their lives, their passions will have been sparked by all of you. And I know that many of these youth will grow up with a much larger appreciation for more than just monarchs.

Dynamic and meaningful outdoor learning experiences are in no small thanks to you. They will remember what they did with you, their teachers, for the rest of their lives. And we cannot discount the impact of informal educators either – you are the gateways to nature, a resource for teachers who want more for their students but don’t have the time or the means to give it to them themselves. I have no doubt that when they are older if they are ever asked “Share a positive school experience ____?” The answer could lead back to the
outdoor learning time they spent with you learning to identify plants and caterpillar instars, the investigations they developed, and the connections they made to their fellow youth, to science, and to nature.

check out these great resources!

forward to a friend

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