

RHS Press Release



Embargoed until: 00.01 28 June 2010

New RHS report says school gardening boosts child development; teaches life skills and makes kids healthier and happier

The Royal Horticultural Society is today urging school gardening to be high on the education agenda and recognised as a key teaching tool.

New research by the RHS *Gardening in Schools – A vital tool for children’s learning* published today (28th June 2010) shows for the first time, the enormous impact gardening plays in a child’s wellbeing, learning and development.

Dr Simon Thornton Wood, Director of Science and Learning, RHS, said, “As the new coalition government considers a new approach to the primary curriculum, we hope they acknowledge the striking conclusions of our research and that gardens enable a creative, flexible approach to teaching that has significant benefits.

“Schools which integrate gardens into the curriculum are developing children who are much more responsive to the challenges of adult life.”

Commissioned by the RHS from independent researchers the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), the report highlights how schools which actively use a garden, develop ‘resilient,’ ‘ready to learn’ and ‘responsible’ children – 3R attributes that make up well-balanced, happier, healthy, rounded individuals. The RHS believes these 3 R’s can be learnt when gardening is used as a teaching tool, not just an extra-curricular activity.

The NFER surveyed a selection of 1,300 school teachers and studied in-depth 10 schools belonging to the RHS Campaign for School Gardening, from a large urban London primary to small village school in Yorkshire, to discover that gardening in schools encourages children to:

- Become stronger, more **active learners** capable of thinking independently and adapting their skills and knowledge to new challenges at school and in future;
- Gain a more **resilient, confident and responsible** approach to life so they can achieve their goals and play a positive role in society;
- Learn **vital jobs skills** such as presentation skills, communication and team work, and fuel their **entrepreneurial spirit**;

- Embrace a **healthier, more active** lifestyle as an important tool for success at school and beyond;
- Develop the ability to **work and communicate with people from all ages** and backgrounds.

Gillian Pugh, Chair of the National Children's Bureau and The Cambridge Primary Review, explains, "Not only does gardening provide opportunities for increasing scientific knowledge and understanding, and improving literacy, numeracy and oracy, but this report shows that it also improves pupils' confidence, resilience and self-esteem."

In 2007, the RHS Campaign for School Gardening was launched to encourage schools to create gardens. There are currently 12,000 schools signed up to the Campaign, benefiting over 2.5million pupils.

Over the next three years the RHS will campaign to get the benefits of gardening in schools better and more widely understood and train 4,500 teachers in how to use a garden as an essential teaching tool.

The RHS' commitment to education is further demonstrated this week, as it opens its new multi-million pound green learning centre at RHS Garden Harlow Carr in Yorkshire. The building which is one of the greenest in the country is constructed from natural and recycled materials; has a grey water recycling system; passive solar heating and a green sedum roof and includes a zero carbon rating; a wind turbine and ground source heat pump. Made possible through the generosity of donors, it will enable the charity to educate over 10,000 thousand children and adults a year at Harlow Carr.

For more information on the RHS Campaign for School Gardening, its new learning centre and to download a copy of the *Gardening in Schools – A vital tool for children's learning* please visit www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening

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Notes to editors

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The National Children's Bureau

NCB is a charitable organisation that is dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives and providing them with a powerful and authoritative voice.

www.ncb.org.uk

The Cambridge Review:

The Cambridge Primary Review is a wide-ranging independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. It is supported from 2006-10 by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and is based at the University of Cambridge.

http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/PDFs/LEAFLET_REPORTS.pdf

Primary curriculum proposed changes:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/curriculum>

Report Case Studies

- **Ready to learn (exciting a child about the possibilities of learning; helping them learn in a manner that suits them)**

School gardens stimulated a love of learning through translating sometimes dry academic subjects into practical, real world experiences e.g. history lessons about Dig for Victory and the Second World War. Two fellow allotment gardeners, Bob and Stan share their evacuee experiences with pupils and an old air raid shelter on the allotment was used for a scene-setting classroom.

Teachers at All Saints agreed that the practical, hands on nature of gardening made it ideally suited for today's more flexible and creative approach to teaching. As Lesley Fielding put it, "Everything is learnt from themes".

Teacher Lesley Fielding, All Saints CE Primary School, Chatham, Kent

- **Resilient (boosting self-esteem and preparing them for life's knocks)**

Key to boosting children's confidence was the school garden's ability to act as a leveller. This was most striking for children with Special Educational Needs, behavioural problems or sometimes demotivated by conventional learning.

"Our teachers have to deal with some pupils with challenging behaviour - embedding gardening in the curriculum has helped change that. Formal learning's smaller achievable steps can be frustrating for those who have difficulty focusing or have other barriers to learning. The physical side of gardening helps them stay focused."

Deputy Head, Emma Woollon, Pirton Primary School, Luton

- **Responsible (allowing a child to develop a sense of responsibility for themselves and their community)**

Children who garden displayed a greater awareness of sustainability and responsibility to the environment e.g. several schools built bottle greenhouses using plastic bottles. Teaching children to take control of their own physical safety, by trusting them with garden chemicals and sharp tools, was seen as another valid and useful skill said teachers.

“As well as teaching important skills for later life, gardening encourages children to take more responsibility for each other with older pupils teaching younger ones, they point out things such as worms saying ‘We like worms because they’re good for the soil’. It’s great.”

Elisabeth Briley, Gardening Co-ordinator Orford Primary School, Woodbridge, Suffolk

About the RHS

The RHS believes that gardening improves the quality of life and that everyone should have access to great garden experiences. As a charity we help to bring gardening into people’s lives and support gardeners of all levels and abilities; whether they are expert horticulturists or children who are planting seeds for the very first time.

RHS membership is for anyone with an interest in gardening. Support the RHS and secure a healthy future for gardening. For more information call: 0845 130 4646, or visit www.rhs.org.uk

Campaign for School Gardening

The RHS has actively involved 12,000 schools across the UK in growing and gardening through Campaign for School Gardening. Children are taught about plants and gardening and their environment. Through gardening they learn about healthy fruit and vegetables, wildlife, and important life skills such as teamwork, social skills and co-operation. Huge benefits are to be had from using an outdoor classroom where children can learn in a fun, engaging way. Information, lesson plans and advice for schools is provided online and is backed up by support from the RHS education team and Campaign for School Gardening Regional Advisors. There are three regions across the UK supported by Regional Advisors, London, East of England and Yorkshire and The Humber.

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