

Gardening with Children – February 6, 2014



Judith Cox, Master Gardener, presented a very interesting talk on the subject of **“Gardening with Children”**. Judith works full time as a gardener in the rural west end of Ottawa at Saunders Farm. The Farm covers 100 acres and has “acres of gardens”.

Judith’s gardening passions are heritage vegetables, roses and fairy garden accessories. She has tended a constantly evolving Fairy Garden for several years and

is always looking for new ways to bring magic into the garden. She particularly works with children who visit the farm. To illustrate the fun she has in working with children she began by sharing with us some of the many questions that children ask including: "If I plant a sandwich will it grow?" and "Do worms have ears?" In the vegetable garden, Judith allows lettuce to go to seed for interest, grows small yellow tomatoes for children to try and grows purple carrots that are another curiosity for children.

Judith had many ideas for engaging children in gardening, even in the winter. She suggested, for example, cutting out photos from seed catalogues for children to look at and to select flowers or vegetables that they would like to grow in the spring. Early in the season it is a good idea to develop a starter garden for children, maximum about 8 feet by 8 feet in which they can plant a few vegetables, such as carrots, lettuce, beans, and tiny pumpkins as well as colourful and easy to grow flowers such as pansies, marigolds and nasturtiums. If you want to grow bigger pumpkins grow one, for example, on a compost pile. Even for very young children planting a big pot or planter is a good idea with pansies, nasturtiums and sunflowers as examples of interesting flowers.

For gardening indoors with children, Judith suggested that a pineapple top is an interesting plant to grow, although she admitted to not having success with this herself. Growing an avocado plant from seed is another project as is starting bean seeds in a clear plastic bottle. In the latter case, plant the seeds so that they are visible on the inside edge of the bottle and children can watch the roots, stem and leaves grow.

A fascinating section of her talk was the description of her Fairy Garden at Saunders Farm. She has developed this garden over the years and has quite a following of children who have become regular visitors to the farm in the summer months. The choice of flowers and herbs are those that attract butterflies and bees and that are colourful and scented.

Judith talked about the smaller props for her fairy gardens, particularly for the planters that she develops as fairy gardens; these props include small houses, small wind chimes for air, coloured glass beads used as shiny rocks to imitate water, and sparkly objects that can be used to imitate fire. Many of her small accessories she finds at the dollar stores. If developing a fairy garden in an existing garden it is recommended to try to anchor it around a fruit tree with lots of blossom, like a crab-apple, or around a

rose. She talked about using lilies, foxgloves and herbs in the garden as well; recognizing that some plants are poisonous (foxglove).

Judith took us step-by-step through the designing of a fairy garden in a shallow wide planter. She noted that it is important to fill the planter with soil up to the rim. She then planted a miniature rose, shamrocks and rosemary and decorated the surface with a small painted house, rocks, sparking items to represent water, a small frog and other miniature accessories that would create a scene to stimulate the imagination of a child. Fine mulch was used to cover the soil.

Judith obviously really enjoys this aspect of her work and judging by the response from the members who attended the talk, she caught many of us up in her enthusiasm. There may be fairy gardens popping up all over Greely this coming gardening season!