

PLANTING



BRYAN BURRIS

Sandtown program teaches children about gardening

a SEED

beneath the red bud trees, Tori Brooks is digging a hole. At least she is trying. A recent drought has made the earth dusty and brick-hard. A sixth grader at New Song Academy in Baltimore's Sandtown neighborhood, Tori chops at the ground with a large shovel. Her goal is to carve out a comfortable home for the exuberant Christmas fern that waits nearby to be planted.

With the encouragement of Corky Goetzke, a member of the Guilford Garden Club, Tori gives the soil another hard jab. "Remember, try to go straight down with the shovel, then pull up again," Goetzke says. "Try again."

"Whew!" says Tori. She pauses briefly and looks around the garden. It isn't large, but it is busy. Classmates are digging holes for more ferns and ornamental grasses, pulling weeds from among the stalks of goldenrod or watering the tumbling phlox. This isn't the first time Tori has gardened: She once planted sunflower seeds and watched them grow. But this is the first time she has ever sustained a garden and watched it change with the seasons.

All in all, she says, it's fun. "We play out here and work out here. We see birds. We sometimes see butterflies. But it's hard work."

Students at New Song Academy work in their garden, which is filled with plants native to Maryland. Members of the Guilford Garden Club teach the youngsters about gardening.



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{ BY HOLLY SELBY }

The garden, a rectangular patch of nature sandwiched between the school and an ill-kempt rowhouse yard, was designed and planted by members of the Guilford club. The goal, says member Kay McConnell, was to create a place where children could savor nature, where native plants could thrive and, with luck, where birds and butterflies would make their homes.

Part of the mission of the 83-year-old Guilford club is to stimulate knowledge and love of gardening and to protect native plants, McConnell says. A few years ago, members proposed to the school that they create a garden filled with plants native to Maryland.

They chose hardy shrubs, flowers and trees that would provide color and texture throughout the seasons — and that also would attract birds and butterflies. The birds, bugs and butterflies, in turn, help pollinate the garden. A \$2,000 grant from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation helped launch the project. (The Guilford club now also oversees an even larger native plant garden at Baltimore's Friends School.)

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Now the New Song garden is an oasis of green in the midst of the brick rowhouses and concrete sidewalks and streets of the city. Sometimes trash is thrown over the ornate fence, and rats have at times been a problem, club members say.

Looking outside from the school, you might see what looks like a school of fish swimming past. The blue, green and yellow creations are sculptures, made and installed by members of an art class.

The garden, which runs along the school from front to back, is designed to fill the eye with colors that change from cool to hot. Close to the building are tall green ornamental grasses, bushy blue asters and low-growing white phlox. Farther afield are brown-eyed Susans with their cheerful yellow petals, tall pink phlox and prickly holly bushes with red berries. A stone path winds from front gate to back. Despite the sounds of passing cars and occasional sirens in the distance, the garden feels removed from the city's hustle and bustle.

On this bright morning, a steady stream of children flows into the yard. Each newcomer who enters the garden is joined by a club member — and the two-person team quickly gets to work. There is pruning to be done and weeding. A few children are allowed to water the plants (somehow, no one gets wet) and several begin to dig holes for new plantings.

Close to the school building, fifth grader Alana Mitchell works with club member Helen Crouch to plant new ornamental grass. “Do you think if we plant it here it will have room to grow?” Crouch asks.

The two decide to move the grass a little farther from the building. “I think it will be happier here,” says Alana, as she leans hard against the shovel.

Club member and resident native plant expert Ann Lundy points to a false blue indigo plant. “It is a member of the pea family and was used to make blue dye by the settlers,” she says. “In late summer it has seed pods — big black ones like sugar snap peas. They attract birds.”

As Lundy speaks, the children stop to listen before continuing their chores. “I like to plant things,” says sixth grader Jazmon Churchill. “I like to see if they come up. And I like to water them and then wait to see if they’ll grow.” **sw**

COMMUNITY GARDENS

You don't need a yard to grow your own produce. Here is a partial list of community gardens in Baltimore City and County.



BALTIMORE CITY

The Garden on the Hill/ Reservoir Hill

728-732 Lennox St.
Baltimore 21217

Homestead Harvest Garden

623 Homestead St.
Baltimore 21218

Lauraville Garden

4200 Elsrade Ave.
Baltimore 21214

Growing Girls and Gardens

Garrison Middle School
3910 Barrington Road
Baltimore 21207

Coppin Heights Garden

2400 block W. North Avenue
Baltimore 21216

Mt. Washington Community Garden

Lochlea Road &
Tanbark Drive
Baltimore 21209

Greater Model Community Garden

Schroeder Street & W.
Fairmount Avenue
Baltimore 21223

St. Ambrose

3446-3556 Park Heights Ave.
Baltimore 21215

Hampden

Community Garden

Roosevelt Park
Falls Road & 36th Street
Baltimore 21211

Kensington

Community Garden

4200-4300 S. College Road
Baltimore 21229

Upper Fells Point Garden

1827-1829 E. Pratt St.
Baltimore 21231

Gardens of Hope

1200 Shields Place
Baltimore 21217

Madeira Street Garden

400 block N. Madeira St.
Baltimore 21231

Belair-Edison

Community Garden

Kenyon Avenue & Brehms
Lane
Baltimore 21213

BALTIMORE COUNTY

County Home Park

10401 Greenside Drive
Cockeysville, MD 21030

Rockdale Park

3326 N. Rolling Road
Liberty Road, MD 21207

Stansbury Park

7880 Stansbury Road
Dundalk-Eastfield, MD
21222

Community Garden

Pleasant Plains
Elementary School
8300 Pleasant Plains Road
Towson, MD 21286

Putty Hill

Community Garden
Putty Hill Avenue &
LaSalle Road
Towson, MD 21286

Northwest Regional Park

4515 Deer Park Road
Owings Mills, MD 21117

Oregon Ridge Park

13401 Beaver Dam Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030

*List compiled by Jess Blumberg.
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