

The Importance of Nature in Our Lives: Plants and People

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Childhood experiences of plants, gardening, and nature...

Playing in the creek,
Helping granddad plant potatoes,
Planting a moss garden,
Filling hummingbird feeders,
Picking up pecans, shelling beans,
Fishing in a lake surrounded by pine trees.





Today people are increasingly disconnected from plants and nature:

Kids (and most adults) don't see plants.

PLANT BLINDNESS, Wandersee and Schlusser, 1998

They lack a connection to plants and nature.

NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER, Richard Louv, 2005

They cannot name the **ECOSYSTEM** in which they live.

Last Child in the Woods

Direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development— physical, emotional, and spiritual. What's more, nature is a potent therapy for depression, obesity, and ADD. Environment-based education dramatically improves standardized test scores and grade point averages and develops skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision making. Even creativity is stimulated by childhood experiences in nature.

Richard Louv,

Last Child in the Woods, 2005

Physical health benefits for individuals



- More active lifestyles,
- Reduced stress and blood pressure,
- Increased focus, and
- More positive outlook, (to name just a few).

Academic and interpersonal benefits for youth

- Unstructured nature play is essential for healthy development of children:
 - Creative and critical thinking,
 - Improved cognitive development,
 - Enriched social interactions,
 - Increased self-esteem, and a
 - Positive environmental ethic that continues through life.
- Kids and families who play and explore in nature are healthier, happier and smarter (NatureRocks.org)



Community level benefits



- Less recognized, perhaps, are the powerful benefits at the aggregate community level.
- Parks & green spaces are associated with:
 - Safer neighborhoods,
 - Decreased vandalism and crime,
 - More close-knit communities, and
 - Increased property values.
 - Social communities are strengthened in areas with parks.
- Nature experiences help create community.

Growing body of research supports the importance of plants, nature, gardening, and the environment:

- **NatureRocks.org**
 - Site for searching opportunities for nature play and exploration
- **ProjectEvergreen.org**
 - LIFESTYLE FACT SHEET: The Social Benefits of Green Spaces
- **White Hutchison Leisure & Learning Group**
 - Benefits for Children of Play in Nature, by Randy White



School & Youth Gardens– nature-based education is growing!

- Brain-based learning
- Enhances health and wellness
- Connects back to plants as food source
- Increases environmental awareness and knowledge
- Gives local context and meaning to curricular standards
- Increases science achievement

STEM

STEAM

STREAM



Current trends

- Heightened awareness of health issues
- Interest in fresh, local food



- Increased awareness of human impact on the environment
- Desire to reconnect with nature

Current trends

Reflected at botanical gardens, and perhaps also in private landscape industry?

- Plants as a way to reconnect to food and enhance our health.
 - Culinary Gardens, Outdoor Kitchens
 - Plant-based ingredients, Garden Smoothies, Plant-based Cocktails
- Garden and nature-based experiences to reconnect to the environment.
 - Children's Gardens, Loose Parts Play, Pollinator and Butterfly Gardens

Plants, gardens, and nature experiences provide...

Physical Experiences—
Places of activity & wellness



Plants, gardens, and nature experiences provide...

Cognitive Experiences—
Places of learning



Plants, gardens, and nature experiences provide...

Social Experiences—

Places for shared experiences
and gatherings



Plants, gardens, and nature experiences provide...

Emotional/Spiritual Experiences—
Places for reflection & inspiration



New Specialization: Family Gardens!

- Include space for hands-on gardening & nature play
- Allow for whimsy– forts, play houses & mud kitchens
- Leave a messy space for digging & active play
- Provide ‘real’ child-sized tools
- Keep it small
- Have fun!

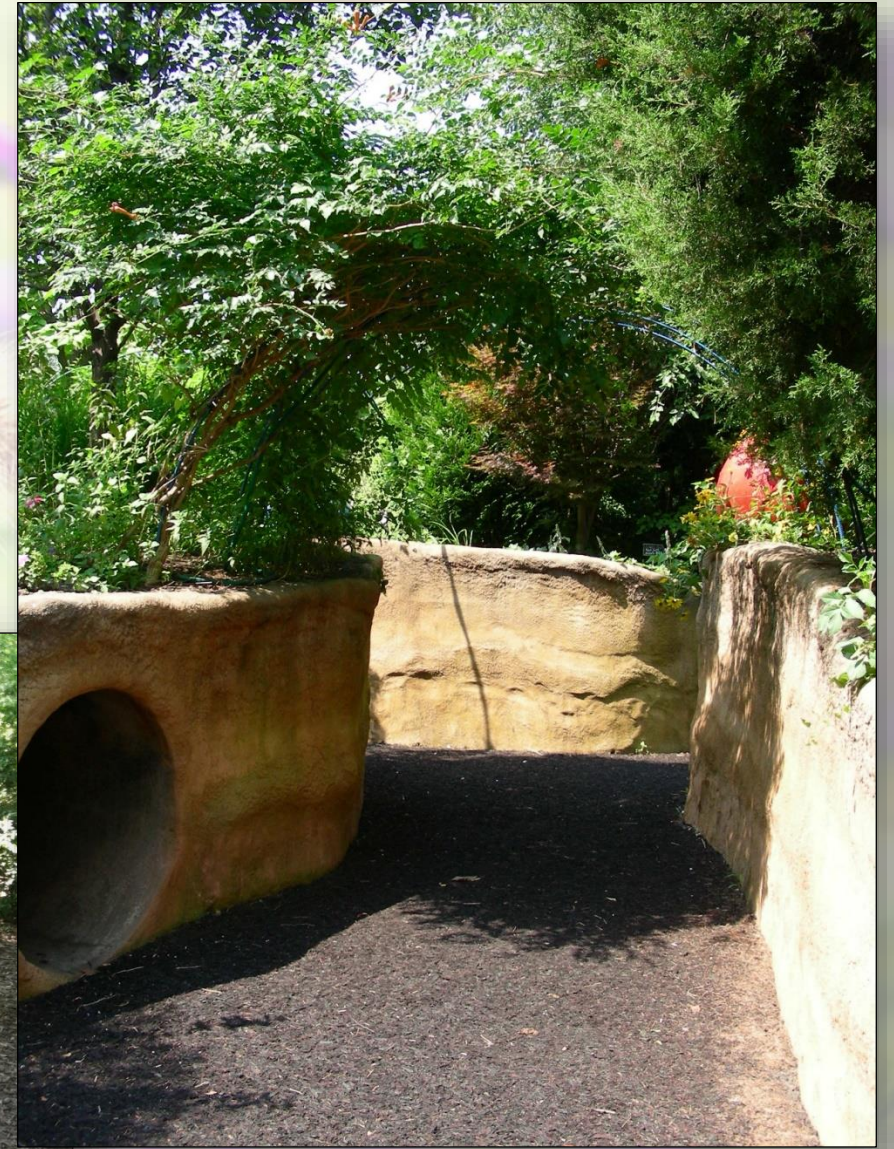


How can you jump in?

- Theme gardens work well:
 - Butterfly/Bird/Wildlife Gardens
 - Favorite color
 - Dinosaur Garden
 - Fairy Garden
 - Container Gardens, Raised beds
- Provide information on benefits of time in nature– value-added benefits for the landscape industry
- Gift families with a set of child-sized garden tools



Incorporate structural elements



Make it artful



Include water, if possible

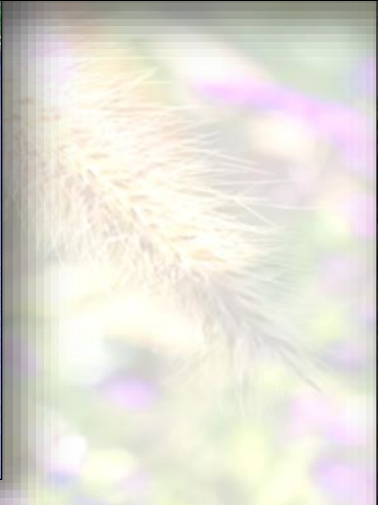


Don't forget quiet spaces.



Opportunities for solitude are important, too.

Incorporate sensory, texture, and hands-on features...





**Create PHENOMENAL EXPERIENCES with
plants, gardens, and nature...**

**...so that current and future guests/customers
will be INSPIRED to love plants, gardening,
and nature, too!**

Planning ahead for new experiences at ZBG...

- Master Plan, Phase 1 Community Engagement
 - How can ZBG represent the unique 'weirdness' of Austin?
 - What type of experiences— gardens, programs, events, exhibits, or services— would 'fit' ZBG and enhance it as a destination spot for residents and visitors?
- Taniguchi Japanese Garden 50th Anniversary, 2019
- Dino Day, Saturday, March 16, 10-2

THANK YOU!

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