

## Welcome to Genevieve's Teaching Garden!

**R.E. Thalberg Elementary School,  
Southington, CT**

Our outdoor educational classroom, located in an enclosed courtyard, provides all children and staff at R.E. Thalberg School the opportunity to study and appreciate nature. Our mission is to develop an accessible garden to complement our accessible school, and to promote sustainable learning in an outdoor classroom. We are fortunate to have so much support from our community.



The Courtyard garden has blossomed over the past ten years as a result of efforts by staff, students, and their families. Most recently, and throughout the 2011-2012 school year, our knowledge of gardening has been nourished and cultivated by the Orchard Valley Garden Club of Southington.



They have shared hours of volunteer time offering support via materials, finances, and expertise. The children love the interaction with the club members.



The guardians of our micro-climate environment are fourth and fifth grade students, along with the private, not-for profit Oak Hill School/Connecticut Institute for the Blind classroom housed within the school. These seventy students take turns three times each week, working in the garden during harvest and planting times. Annuals and perennials shower prolific colors spring through fall. Vegetables are planted along the perimeter of the garden and will be shared with Southington's food pantry in the fall.



Over the years we have created an ecosystem that has attracted birds and butterflies. Kindergarten classes release painted ladies. Our butterfly bush attracts monarchs each year. Students have learned how to

compost and make better use of our natural resources by learning how to effectively place materials in a 3-Bin Composting System. Students have been encouraged to recognize public safety by installing a solar birdbath, which uses available energy and



avoids standing water, which encourage mosquitoes. Our staff encourages students to better use our natural resources and to appreciate the importance of sustainable practices.



Students are encouraged to use the garden surroundings to stimulate creative and descriptive prose and poetry. Our annual event, an "Evening in the Garden" provides families with the opportunity to picnic together while listening to poetry authored by the fourth graders. Math projects include taking measurements for a new storage shed for the garden tools, as well as creating numerous math application problems (lessons in area, perimeter, story problems). The



garden challenges and heightens observation and sensory skills. Children and adults alike are awestruck by the unfolding story the garden tells.

During the past winter months, students were treated to projects organized by the Orchard Valley Garden Club. These engaging and instructional lessons included creating holiday centerpieces that were shared throughout the community, and decorating a tree in the courtyard, first with holiday decorations and then with pinecones covered with seeds. In addition, students created Valentine cards and pins to share with friends and loved ones. Early in spring we planted pole bean and bush bean seeds in recycled containers.



We have been most fortunate to be the recipients of several grants, which have helped us to sustain our learning and material needs. These include grants from Activate Southington, Master Gardener, Lowe's Toolbox for Education, and two Southington Education Foundation grants. We have an ongoing relationship with UCONN Master Gardeners and Composters.

"Genevieve's Teaching Garden" is named in honor of our patroness, Mrs.

Genevieve Thalberg.

*Submitted by Mrs. Linda Bass Reilly, Coordinator & Grade 4 Teacher, R.E. Thalberg Elementary School*