

The Importance of Nature in Our Lives: Plants and People

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I learned to love plants, gardening, and nature as a child...

Playing in the creek by my house,
Helping my granddad plant potatoes,
Planting a moss garden with my sister,
Filling hummingbird feeders with my
grandmother,
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, 2005

Time spent in 'Green Space' is good for us!



- Green spaces are linked with a multitude of health benefits for individuals:
 - More active lifestyles,
 - Reduced stress and blood pressure,
 - Increased focus, and
 - More positive outlook, (to name just a few).

Time spent in 'Green Space' is good for us!

- Unstructured nature play in green spaces is essential for the healthy development of children, promoting:
 - Creative and critical thinking,
 - Improved cognitive development,
 - Enriched social interactions,
 - Increased activity levels,
 - Increased self-esteem, a
 - Positive environmental ethic that continues through life.
- Kids and Families Who Play and Explore in Nature are Healthier, Happier and Smarter (NatureRocks.org)



Growing body of research and evaluation 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 kids back to plants as the source of food
- Increases environmental awareness and knowledge
- Gives local context and meaning to curricular standards
- Increases science achievement

STEM

STEAM

STREAM



Soil to Supper: Plant Parts We Eat

- Roots
- Stems
- Leaves
- Flowers
- Fruit
- Seeds



What plant parts have you eaten today?

What plant parts are in your fridge? Pantry? Spice cabinet?

What plant parts are in your grocery cart?

Time spent in 'Green Space' is good for us!



- 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.
- To sum it up, parks help create community.

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
- Gardening– and eating– as a way to explore plants as taste-full food.
 - Cooking from the Garden, Garden Smoothies, Plant-based Cocktails
- Garden and nature-based experiences to reconnect to the environment.
 - Children’s Gardens, Loose Parts Play, Pollinator/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 messy– don't worry about straight lines
- Provide 'real' child-sized tools
- Leave a space for digging
- Have fun!



New Specialization: Family Gardens!

- What to plant? Themes work well:
 - Butterfly/Bird/Wildlife Gardens
 - Wildlife Austin, NWF Backyard Habitats
 - Favorite color
 - Plant Part
 - Alphabet
 - Container Gardens, Raised beds
- Keep it small, encourage 'failures'
- Provide information on benefits of time in nature— value-added benefits for the landscape industry



Incorporate structural elements



Make it artful



Include water, if possible



Don't forget quiet spaces.



Opportunities for solitude are important, too.

Sensory, texture, and hands-on are essential...

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Planning ahead for new experiences at ZBG...

- Master Plan, Phase 1
- Widespread input– need your ideas!
 - 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?
- Community engagement opportunities flyer

A close-up photograph of a garden. In the foreground, there are several large, golden-brown, feathery seed heads of a grass-like plant. Behind them, there are numerous small, vibrant purple flowers. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting more foliage. The overall lighting is bright and natural, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

**Create phenomenal experiences with
plants, gardens, and nature...**

**...so that current and future visitors will be inspired
to love plants, gardening, and nature, too!**