

## Namaste Children's Garden Grant Final Report

In applying for the NH Audubon and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant, our proposal outlined three main goals:

- Creating a healthy ecosystem for our area;
- Supporting migratory birds necessary for controlling insect populations; and
- Providing hands-on, immersive curricula for students.

To accomplish these goals, the school community created a pollinator peace garden, with students fully immersed in the process of planning and caring for a healthy ecosystem. They began the planning stage by:

- Measuring the garden space;
- Researching a variety of plant species and cataloguing their sun and soil needs, and how the particular species attracts pollinators. Their research books have been added to our classroom library;
- Researching beneficial bird species and cataloguing their song, their favorite food, and their habitat. These research books have also been added to our classroom library.

We must thank local business Grasshoppers Landscaping for their special contribution in the planning phase, removing all grass, supplementing the soil with compost, and providing the materials to create the pathway.

The implementation phase saw the children's research applied during a field trip to Uncanoonuc Mountain Perennials. There, students were able to use their research to identify and purchase the plant species studied in class. A big thank you to Nettie Rynearson and her team for welcoming us and providing an amazing horticultural field trip experience. Following the outing, the children returned to school with their parents and planted their variety in the garden. The children continued to care for their plants through the completion of the school year.

When we returned to school in September, the children resumed care of the garden and curricula immersion:

- Students harvested and arranged flowers to beautify our classroom.
- We studied a variety of butterflies that visited our garden and observed differences in their wings.
- We ran away from a few bees but were grateful for their work in the garden!
- All friends enjoyed bird watching and writing down observations to share with the class.
- Lower elementary friends further studied the external parts and body functions of birds.
- As the leaves began to change, friends in the primary classroom collected and classified leaves as simple or complex. The lower elementary followed suit with more advanced classification of leaves as spatulate, oblong, etc.
- This spring, friends will enjoy botany lessons and experiments related to the functions of plants.

Needless to say, each season has provided a bounty of learning. We loved spending time under our bean hut, eating green beans when we took a run, or discovering a new butterfly species we had never seen. We just put the "garden to bed" and are looking forward to the new adventures winter will bring. We are excited for birds to nest in the houses we worked to build this fall.

Friends took great care in washing windows to ensure the suction cup keeps the bird house up

all winter. They also created special nesting balls that include materials birds can use for the nest making. As we write this completion report, friends will be making suet to hang on our apple tree for the winter. They placed seeds they had grown, from sunflowers they planted during spring in the nesting boxes, in hopes it would entice a feathered friend to nest for the winter. Friends care tremendously about the ecosystem they created, and we look forward to it being a great source of pride and learning for years to come.



## **Namaste Children's Garden: A Parent's Perspective**

When asked by numerous people over the summer where my children would be headed come fall, I answered that they went to Namaste, a small Montessori school on Mast Road. "Oh, the sunflower school!", they'd reply. Yes! The sunflower school. The beautiful garden that the children worked so hard to create in the spring was brimming with flowers, abuzz with the hum of bee wings and the quiet whisper of butterflies. And my children were abuzz with tales of blue jays and red jays (even pink and purple and rainbow jays!), "good" insects that are friends to flowers and people alike, dropping words like "proboscis" in everyday conversation. .

Over the summer, my children made it their mission to cultivate at home a habitat equal to the school garden for our own migratory birds, butterflies, and bees. We carefully tended our own flowers, placed a number of seed and suet feeders, and made butterfly houses. We even made a special trip to The Fells where we chose historical local plants to donate to the school garden. If the measure of this grant's success is the enthusiasm of the children impacted by it, my two little stewards of mother earth are a sure sign its aims were achieved.

One of the first days of the new school year, I was greeted by a small army of lower elementary friends wielding a felled sunflower, its stalk a full seven feet, like a battering ram. Its seeds, they explained, were for the birds who'd made a happy home of their garden. They eagerly took measurements, and in the coming days harvested with busy fingers the seeds of a great many sunflowers to ensure their feathered friends would have all they needed to survive another New Hampshire winter. As autumn set in, my girls raced the wind to catch falling simple, complex, smooth-edged, and tooth-edged leaves for their studies in the classroom. And as winter approaches, there is constant chatter about the nesting needs of those birds who make their homes here year-round.

My children have benefitted enormously from this grant. It has both instilled and reinforced their love for mother earth and their appreciation of everything that makes a healthy ecosystem. As a parent, I feel deeply grateful to the Audubon and US Fish and Wildlife Service for providing this wonderful opportunity to Namaste and our community.