

EXPLAINING

Gardens, Gardens Everywhere!

By David Whitman, Fairchild Challenge Manager

Little compares to the harmony-inducing and soul-healing effects of gardening, and Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden is doing all it can to involve South Florida's youth in gardening as a life skill.



Students pose proudly in their Fairchild Challenge school garden at Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High.

Forty schools competing in the annual school gardening and habitat restoration option of this year's Fairchild Challenge were awarded up to \$200 each—\$6,100 collectively—by Fairchild last month for their projects, in addition to an innovative YourOutDoors tool kit designed for young gardeners.

Representing 130 South Florida secondary schools (plus ten elementary schools in a pilot program), tens of thousands of students are actively involved in this year's multidisciplinary Fairchild Challenge competitions, and school gardening is one of the most popular options.

School gardens reflect the immense creativity, diversity and exuberance of students who are active in the Fairchild Challenge. They also encourage teamwork, where friendships and mutual respect naturally grow in tandem with the gardens. And many students who struggle in traditional classroom settings find that they excel in gardening and habitat restoration projects, increasing their knowledge, self-confidence, academic performance and appreciation of nature.

Children today expect instant results and constant excitement. The school garden gives them a place of peace, a place to learn patience, a place to work and watch things grow. It is a place where things take time. It is a place to build self-esteem and wisdom.

*Michelle Dreseris, Ruth Owens Kruse
Educational Center*

responsibility for beautifying their environment," added Chormanski. Fairchild's community outreach coordinator, Alison Walker, teamed up with Chormanski and colleague April Dominguez to conduct two free, daylong gardening workshops

"School gardens also provide opportunities to learn horticultural skills, observe nature, discover plant lifecycles and identify where our food comes from," notes Fairchild's education outreach coordinator Theresa Chormanski. "Teachers use gardens as spring-boards to introduce science, language and visual arts, social studies, math and many other disciplines. School gardens let students take ownership in their school and


responsibility for beautifying their environment," added Chormanski. Fairchild's community outreach coordinator, Alison Walker, teamed up with Chormanski and colleague April Dominguez to conduct two free, daylong gardening workshops

annually for teachers. During the Saturday workshops, teachers learned from Fairchild's conservation ecologist Dr. Joyce Maschinski how to restore schoolyards to pine rockland habitats. Maschinski and seed technician Don Walters trained participants to establish and care for pine rockland species, and provided each with a starter kit of native plants for their schools.

The Fairchild Challenge supports school gardening and habitat restoration at schools in other ways, too. Last year it offered each participating school a mango or jackfruit sapling. Teachers have received various resource books: Georgia Tasker's *Enchanted Ground: Gardening with Nature in the Subtropics*, David Fairchild's *The World Was My Garden, Travels of a Plant Explorer* and William Whitman's *Five Decades with Tropical Fruit, A Personal Journey*.

The Fairchild Challenge works with nurseries to provide seeds and plants and coordinates volunteers with gardening expertise (notable among them Don Evans, Fairchild's retired director of grounds management, and Margie Bauer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture) to advise schools on their gardens.

In the past, the students have created a dizzying array of gardens, including native, butterfly, vegetable, pond ecosystem, hummingbird, greenhouse, edible, memorial, tranquility, arid, pine rockland, carnivorous, orchid, Egyptian, color, moveable, salsa, art, aquatic, Shakespeare and, yes, pizza gardens!

In mid-April, Fairchild Challenge representatives will visit an estimated 75 schools throughout the region to see, smell, taste and fully appreciate the gardens the students have created. Then, on April 22, gardening experts and enthusiasts will evaluate the projects based on reports and photographs submitted by the competing schools. 

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Final results of the Fairchild Challenge 2008 competitions will be announced at awards ceremonies on Friday, May 9 (grades 9-12), Saturday, May 10 (grades 6-8), and Tuesday, May 13 (grades K-5). Schools that excel in the program receive the Fairchild Challenge Award, with cash prizes for environmental activities being awarded to the top-scoring schools. Additionally, the school-nominated Fairchild Challenge 2008 Environmental Role Models, or "Emmies," will be honored. Please join us for these celebrations!



Photo by Gabby Orihuela/FTBG

2ND ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL

Nearly 13,000 chocolate lovers attended Fairchild's second annual International Chocolate Festival in late January. For this incredibly decadent event, vendors from Miami, New York and even from as far away as Mexico, prepared for a massive turnout with enough samples and gift-wrapped chocolates to go around. In fact, several tons of chocolate were on-hand. One vendor had over 500 pounds alone! Visitors were quite busy tasting and purchasing a bevy of chocolate delights.

Aside from stuffing yourself silly with chocolate, there was plenty more to do. Whole Foods sponsored wonderful cooking demonstrations, Equinox Fitness Club and Spa Parties offered mini-massages, and Origins got people buttered up with their cocoa butter facials. At the ChocoKids tent, young children were busy playing with chocolate-smelling Play-Doh and coloring cut-out butterflies adding chocolate kisses as decorations.

Guests also enjoyed the guided tours about the cacao tree's natural habit, the rain forest, and the cacao tree display in the Garden House. People were also buying their own cacao trees to take home, as well as "Sharry baby" chocolate orchids. Another favorite souvenir visitors purchased were the chocolate scented festival T-shirts.

BANK OF AMERICA LEARNING GARDEN INAUGURATION

On January 15, Fairchild inaugurated the Bank of America Learning Garden. The Bank of America Learning Garden is the result of a generous grant from Bank of America and comes at a most important time in Fairchild's education and outreach history. Last year, Fairchild reached over 40,000 students and teachers in almost 100 schools in Miami-Dade County.

The Bank of America Learning Garden will help Fairchild tremendously in "growing" the next generation of leaders and stewards of our environment, neighborhoods and communities. This space features a Chickee hut, which serves as an outdoor classroom, cleverly designed planting tables, teak benches and storage facilities. Botanically, the site features native, culturally significant and sensory plantings accompanied with interpretive signs highlighting their importance. Also, these plantings create necessary habitats for birds and butterflies.

The Bank of America Learning Garden at Fairchild provides a venue for visitors of all ages and backgrounds to increase their understanding and appreciation of ecology, plants, art and nature. Thank you, Bank of America!



ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

The Playground Theater will present "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" March 14 through April 11, 2008. The garden scene in this whimsical and exciting production was inspired by Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. Tickets for "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" are available by calling 305.751.9550. Fairchild members may purchase tickets at a special rate of \$10.



Photo by Gabby Orihuela/FTBG

(L-R) Bruce Greer, Maria Alonso, Vincent Tria, Gene Schaefer, Jeremy Davit



Photo by Martha Kent/FTBG

BONSAI SHOW AND SALE

This magnificent bonsai specimen, *Ficus retusa*, was the star attraction at the Bonsai Society of Miami's 21st Annual Show and Sale at Fairchild this past fall. It was imported from China two years ago

where it had been in a private collection. The tree has been passed down three generations within a family and is between 80 and 100 years old. It now resides at Miami Tropical Bonsai. Congratulations to the Bonsai Society of Miami for another an excellent show and sale.



THE FAIRCHILD CHALLENGE IN COSTA RICA

La Selva Biological Station is one of 43 institutions worldwide that has been trained as a satellite partner to implement the Fairchild Challenge. Students from schools participating in the Fairchild Challenge at La Selva have also been creating botanical illustrations and environmental cartoons, doing research projects and intergenerational interviews, and participating in reforestation efforts in the biological corridor of San Juan-La Selva.

Become a **volunteer at Fairchild**
and
Be part of a **wonderful community**
Gain **Knowledge** and
Be part of a **global conservation**
effort right here in South Florida

Volunteers are needed now for guiding, gardening and to serve as hosts and docents for the *Botero, Chihuly and Lichtenstein* at Fairchild exhibition.

For more information about becoming a volunteer, please call Sandy at 305.667.1651, ext. 3324.

Thanks! We hope to see you at the garden soon!



FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN
Photos by Julie Petrie/FTBG.



Students from El Tigre school in Costa Rica proudly display a tree planted in their school yard during their first year participating in the Fairchild Challenge.

STAFF NEWS

Photos by Gaby Orihuela



APRIL DOMINGUEZ created and coordinated the Discovery program at Fairchild since September 2005. Utilizing her previous professional experience from the Chicago Botanic Garden and Peace Corps, Panama, she developed a program that ultimately connects students to science, technology and art. In mid-February, April began a new stage in her Fairchild career as Membership Manager. April has a B.S. in Ornamental Horticulture with a design concentration.



TEDD JOHNSON joined the Education Department in April 2007, as graphic designer. Before coming to Fairchild, he operated his own design firm that specialized in creating collateral materials for corporations such as FPL and Jackson Health System. His initial exposure to the garden was attending the Mango Festival with his wife. He looks forward to providing his talents to Fairchild's educational programs.



ALINA BALEAN is a recent graduate from Florida International University, where her last course introduced her to Fairchild. As a young design professional, she is working side-by-side with Fairchild's esteemed marketing department as the in-house graphic designer. Her favorite place in the garden is the Rainforest, because she can see it from her desk everyday.

Give a Membership Gift

Consider a gift of membership and share your support of Fairchild. Members enjoy free admission to Fairchild; a subscription to *The Tropical Garden*; priority registration for Fairchild classes; invitations to members-only events; library privileges; discounts on books, gifts and classes; and free admission to hundreds of gardens, arboreta and science museums throughout the United States. To give the gift of membership or to renew, please contact the membership office at 305.667.1651, ext. 3301 or visit www.fairchildgarden.org.