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Eco-science projects showcased Saturday at Fairchild



Above:

SAMANTHA REGO

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125 students from 25 South Florida public and private high schools will showcase their eco-science projects, including solar-powered devices, models for LEED-certified science classrooms, eco-friendly meals and seed germination research, during the Fairchild Challenge's (FC) annual "Research Projects Showcase" competition. Government officials and other community leaders will serve as judges during the event, which takes place from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, April 10, at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, 10901 Old Cutler Rd.

Many of the students began working on the projects at the beginning of the school year. The event is part of the FC, the environmental outreach program of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG), in which students compete to earn points for their schools toward prizes that are presented at an annual awards ceremony in May.

"It's always impressive to see how creative, innovative and inspired the students are to design projects that could truly benefit our environment," said Amy Padolf, FTBG's youth education manager. "The lessons they learn about environmental conservation stay with them for life."

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During the showcase, students provide two-minute verbal summaries of their projects and answer judges' questions. They are rated on the quality of their research as well as accuracy, technical ability, creativity, presentation, impact and clarity of explanation. Their schools will be awarded points that count toward their overall FC ranking. This year's results will be announced at an awards ceremony on Tuesday, May 18. Students also may enter their projects in the South Florida Regional Science and Engineering Fair.

At the showcase, students will display the following four types of projects:

- LEED-Certified Science Classroom: Students designed and constructed LEED-certified "green" models for 30-seat, 1,800 square foot high school science labs/classrooms. The designs incorporate living, natural botanical components.
- Green Cuisine: In this two-part assignment, students examined the importance of a traditional recipe to one's culture and transform the recipe into a nutritious vegetarian/vegan main course. At the event, students will provide edible samples for the judges while explaining how they transformed the dish, its cultural significance and its nutritional value.
- Solar Inventions: Using solar panels and electric motors donated by FTBG, students designed and created functional, sunlight-powered devices that could be useful in emergency situations.
- Seed Germination Study: Using the scientific method, students designed and constructed controlled experiments to compare germination and growth rates using at least two different seed treatments. Based on those findings and supporting research, their projects explain how one or more environmental factors (dispersal methods, environmental parameters, etc.) affect the germination and growth of the species in its native habitat.

Participating schools are: Archbishop Coleman Carroll High School; Alonzo & Tracy Mourning Senior High; Belen Preparatory School, Christopher Columbus High School; Coral Reef High School; Doctors Charter School; Felix Varela Senior High; G. Holmes Braddock Senior High; Gulliver Preparatory School; Homestead Senior High; John A. Ferguson Senior High; MAST Academy; Mater Academy Charter School; Miami Central Senior High; Miami Jackson Senior High; Miami Killian Senior High; Miami Palmetto Senior High; Miami Springs Senior High; Our Lady of Lourdes Academy; Pembroke Pines Charter School; South Plantation High School, and TERRA Environmental Research Institute.

The Fairchild Challenge, in its eighth year of existence, is quickly growing to become one of the world's most comprehensive and influential youth environmental education programs. The National Forum on Children and Nature, a high-profile campaign of the prestigious Conservation Fund, has recognized it as a worldwide model for connecting youth with the environment in new and creative ways.

About the Fairchild Challenge

The Fairchild Challenge (FC), established in 2002 by South Florida's 70-year-old Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG), seeks to reconnect South Florida's youths with nature through a multi-disciplinary program available free to middle and high schools. Designed to integrate with state curriculum standards, FC offers a series of individual projects and competitions in which schools earn points toward prizes awarded at an annual Awards Ceremony in May. Staff members at FTBG, one of the world's premier conservation and education-oriented gardens, also train educators from public gardens, museums, zoos and other organizations to establish FC programs throughout the U.S. and beyond. More information is available by visiting

www.fairchildchallenge.org or calling (305) 667-1651.

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