

Gardens for Children – Final Report, March – October 2011

Introduction

The garden project addressed children aged 6 to 12 years at elementary schools of Hamburg's east. Children, instructed by gardeners, looked after a garden / a patch on the terrain of their institution. They learned how to cultivate vegetables, salads, herbs and of course flowers. The children gained practical gardening skills suitable for daily use. The project linked age-appropriate physical exercise with basic knowledge on healthy nutrition. The project ran from April to October, once a week for 2 or 3 hours. By this means the children were able to watch the development of plants during the entire crop cycle.

Aspired Aims

- To train the apperception (to see, to smell, to taste, to feel) by dealing with plants.
- To excite children's curiosity towards nature. To convey biological coherences by dealing with garden plants. To sensitize the attention on the natural environment.
- To experience the results of joint and own activities without grades pressure.
- To gain knowledge on cultivation and usage of food plants and herbs.

Thanks to the generous donation of UWW/General Mills Foundation the garden team of Billenetz was again able to provide three Gardens for Children. Since starting the project in March 2011, we planted and cultivated patches of garden in two elementary schools, where these gardens were already in existence from prior activities. Additionally, we created a new garden, thanks to the enthusiastic volunteer-help from the team of General Mills in Hamburg.

General Mills Hamburg, Garden Team 15.04.20011

Rebus – a new Garden for Children came into existence:

Rebus Billstedt is an institution of the school authority in which students, absconding from normal school instruction or showing such extreme behavioural disorders that they can not be instructed in regular school classes, are taken care of. The aim of this institutional care is to reintegrate these children into regular schooling. In order to do so numerous project activities are offered. In this spirit our „Garden for Children“ is a true enrichment for the concept of Rebus.



In the frame of the „Earth Day“, 16 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg built a new garden (4 patches) at Rebus.

Only by the great assistance of the team of General Mills Hamburg this additional garden was possible.

So a new interesting activity could be offered to the Rebus children.

The feedback of the teachers and advisors regarding the new garden was more than positive. The children simply loved their “garden hours”, asking their teachers constantly when the next garden date would be.

Since the end of April the patches had been cultivated and been taken care of with big enthusiasm by several groups of 6 children (aged 8 to 12 yrs) at a time. The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers and even around the framed patches the children found places for additional plants and bushes.

At the end of the crop cycle the children spent many hours in the school kitchen to prepare meals with the vegetables and herbs harvested in their garden.

The following pictures will show the Rebus garden during the entire crop cycle, starting in April (directly after the planting) until September (shortly before the harvesting). Unfortunately nearly all children refused to be photographed for religious reasons. 99% of our garden children (not only at Rebus) are children with a migrant, Islamic background, which bans to take pictures of human beings. Therefore it was absolutely impossible to get a permission of any of the parents for taking pictures (not to even think of publishing them) of their children.

Rebus Garden in April →



Rebus Garden in September:



Garden at the Elementary School Weddestrasse:

The school Weddestraße is a so called „special school“, where slow learners and children with behavioural disorders are looked after. For these children all forms of practical instructions are a big enrichment, as most of them have severe problems with theoretical lessons.

Since the end of March 2011 the already existing patches, which were not being cultivated during the last years, were used for vegetable again. In addition to the two patches a third one was needed and already built by the children, as our gardening course was remembered so fondly, that almost 20 children wanted to participate in our gardening course. Due to the extra intensive pedagogical supervision needed by these children we limited the number of participants to 12 (third to fifth grade).

During the gardening season all three patches were planted with vegetable, herbs and flowers (method of mixed cultivation, suitable vegetables, herbs and flowers in one bed) by the children. At the end of season the children prepared meals of the harvested vegetables and herbs in their school kitchen.



Garden Weddestrasse in June

... and in September



Garden at Fritz Köhne School:

The Fritz Köhne School is a regular elementary school. The average class size is 20 students.

During our regular period of the „Bille in Bewegung“ project (2007 – 2009) there had been cultivated 12 patches, which were looked after once a week by 3 classes. During the last 1.5 years more than half of these patches lay waste, as most teachers have not enough knowledge about vegetable gardening. All the teachers were absolutely enthusiastic about our offer to take care of their garden again. All of the 12 previous patches were reactivated. Two classes (3. resp. 4. grade) looked after the patches. The children planted vegetable, herbs and flowers.





A typical day in the Garden for Children:

Each unit started with an address of welcome by the gardener and the pedagogical assistant and the introduction of today's activities.

At the beginning the gardener explained in an age appropriate way the theoretical basics of the actual work, the development of the plants, etc. This theoretical introduction was done directly in front of the patches, where everyone could see what was talked about.

Then joined practical work at the patch (to sow, to plant, to weed, to care, to water, to crop, etc.)

The children documented the course by photos, drawings and short descriptions of the activities and work steps.

The unit ended with a feedback (what was done, what was learned) and the planning of the next unit.

At the end of the season the children prepared the cropped vegetables, herbs, and berries (herb butter, jam, etc.) and celebrated a common meal of the prepared ingredients, and/or the children took the recipes and products home.

Summary

Our gardening project was carried out as planned and was resoundingly successful. All participants – children, pedagogical assistants and gardener – enjoyed the weekly garden sessions and the results of our gardening project. We were told that the children were looking forward to their gardening hours during the entire week. And even during the summer holidays some children (Weddestrasse) were waiting for us at a weekly arranged time to help us watering the patches.

Teachers and children at all three schools are very happy that our gardening project will continue in 2012!.



Bettina Rosenbusch and Renate Arndt, April 19, 2012