

Litzsinger Road Ecology Center

Community Newsletter

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Going Easy on the Planet

By Bob Coulter

For the past couple of weeks I have been thinking about kids and climate change as I write a couple of new grant proposals. As you know, one of our primary focuses at LREC is on place-based education, linking people to their local community. How can we engage them in big, global issues without scaring them or conveying hopelessness? We need to give them the understanding, tools, and confidence to make a difference now and in the future.

One possible approach is to reframe the issue away from saving the planet and toward a simpler message of going easy on the planet, and not extracting everything we could possibly use. As your mother said, be nice, don't take more than you need, and clean up your mess. While debates continue to rage over the specifics of climate change data, it's hard to go wrong by going easy.



A friend recently passed along a comic that captures it well. Imagine a full auditorium with a list projected on a screen with all of the benefits of reducing our footprint on the planet. One person stands up, asking "What if it's all a hoax and we made the planet better for nothing??"

Thanks for your all of your efforts to help kids as they make our community a better place to live. ☞



TEACHERS:

Please be on the lookout for an email early next week about the 2010–2011 field lab application process.

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Upcoming LREC Events:

Volunteer Enrichment: Schoolyard Visit

April 26, 12:30–2:30pm. Visit one of our partner schools that has made effective educational use of its outdoor spaces. Meet us on the deck at noon if you want to eat lunch with us (brown bag). RSVP to Martha: call (314) 540-4068 or email martha@litzsinger.org.

Deer Creek Stream Sampling: Water Chemistry

April 29, 9am–12pm. Meet at Glass House. Contact Danelle with any questions or to RSVP: (314) 961-4410 or danelle@litzsinger.org.

Upcoming Opportunities:

Children's Garden & Tower Grove House Reopen for Season
April 1. At Missouri Botanical Garden.

Meelani Perry: 1 Woman Show
April 9, 5–8pm. At the Turner Center for the Arts: 3109 Sutton Blvd, Maplewood, MO 63143. Meelani (daughter of LREC's Education Volunteer Denise Perry) uses recycled materials as well as motifs from nature to create fresh, unique art.

Eco Expo 2010

April 10–11, 9:30am–5:30pm daily. At James S. McDonnell Planetarium, Saint Louis Science Center. Free and family friendly. Sustainability topics range from construction and home-building to eco-fashion and beauty. Learn more online at <http://www.ecolifestl.com/Eco-Expo-2010/>.

Earth Day Festival

April 25, 11am–6pm. At MUNY Grounds in Forest Park. Free. Includes hands-on activities, music, food, and a parade. More at <http://www.stlouisearthday.org>.

Simple Pleasures

By JoAnn Ford

As I walk through the halls of Maplewood-Richmond Heights Early Childhood Center (the ECC), I am engaged by the thoughtful student art projects that adorn the walls. The ECC employs a "School as Studio" theme that sees students as artists that represent, interpret, and express their thinking by using various media. This is accomplished, in part, by utilizing the environment: the classroom, school building, schoolyard, and community as "the third teacher," alongside parent and classroom teacher. At school, the environment can be manipulated to this end, but what about the neighborhood around the school? JoAnn Ford, preschool teacher at the ECC, offers some reflections on walking the neighborhood with her students.

—Eddie Jones

When is the last time you walked around your block? What a simple pleasure.

Our preschool walked around our neighborhood all last year. Three-, four-, and five-year-olds met their neighbors; and the neighbors learned the students' names and shouted friendly greetings as we passed. We met the neighbors' pets and observed the plants and birds in their yards.

For whom was this experience more important? It is a difficult question to answer.

The children developed an important understanding and ownership of the neighborhood where many of them live and all of them attend school.

They learned the names of many birds, plants, and trees growing in the neighborhood. They observed bugs and spiders,

worms and snakes. These walks provided a treasure of discoveries.

A less academic result was the development of their confidence as community members. The children were encouraged by knowing the names of neighbors and thrilled with the joyful responses neighbors gave to their greetings. Teachers could take a back seat in these conversations as children began to ask their own questions and add comments about new observations.

So, what was important for the neighbors? One elderly woman

appeared to watch for us each day and opened her door to wave and welcome our greetings, answering our questions and asking questions of her own.

Another woman waited for us after her husband told her of our conversation with him. She met us as we approached their yard. She invited us up and showed us container plants of herbs. She pointed out other vegetable and berry plants. Not long after, she walked to school to see our children in their schoolyard.

At the end of the school year, we invited our special friends to a picnic to celebrate our year of learning. And although it was the end of our school year, it was not the end of our relationships.

Our neighbors have contributed to our learning in concrete ways again this year. Lynn prepared a presentation to share with a small group of children about

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Maplewood-Richmond Heights Early Childhood Center

Location: 2801 Oakland Avenue , Maplewood MO 63143

Grade Levels: preschool through first

Number of Students: about 190

Classrooms Working with LREC: 12

Web site: <http://www.mrhdsd.org/pages/schools/ecc.shtml>

Glass House Quiz: Beauties and Beasts

By Danelle Haake and Deanna Lawlor

Seeing some color after a long winter can be exciting. There are many beautiful flowers blooming at LREC and around your neighborhood this month. However, here in the Glass House, not all the color causes excitement. This month's quiz will test your knowledge on native and non-native local species.

Which spring flowers are native and which are not?



1. Lesser celandine
Ranunculus ficaria



2. Garlic mustard
Alliaria petiolata



3. Virginia bluebells
Mertensia virginica



4. Spring beauties
Claytonia virginica



5. Star of Bethlehem
Ornithogalum umbellatum



6. Indian paintbrush
Castilleja coccinea



7. Periwinkle
Vinca minor



8. May apple
Podophyllum peltatum



9. False garlic
Nothoscordum bivalve



10. Jack-in-the-pulpit
Arisaema triphyllum

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gourds—we now know her as a gourd expert. The preschool children are using the beautiful egg gourds she brought for us to create representations of “garden guests,” the critters we have noticed in our yards.

A man of few words answered our questions about his work in his garden and told us a little more about his yard work. He was surprised when the preschool children knew the word composting and reported to him that we practice composting at school. This neighbor agreed we could greet him by name and one day, after numerous visits, a teacher said to him, “We have called you neighbor and we have called you Steve. I think we can also call you gardener.” One of the children added, “And we can call you friend.”

Simple pleasures, these walks.
Simple pleasure with powerful outcomes. ☞

MRH ECC hosts a conference for Early Childhood Educators, April 23–24, 2010:

Reggio Inspired Learning in an Urban Public School: Using the Pedagogy of Listening—Preschool through First Grade

More info at:

<http://www.mrhhsd.org/pages/misc/mrhconference.shtml>

Quiz Answers, from page 3

1. **Lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) – NON-NATIVE**

Found in our woodlands, lesser celandine is native throughout Europe and west Asia. Lesser celandine is a spring ephemeral, which means it completes the reproductive part of its life cycle and above ground development in late winter and very early spring. It competes with our native spring ephemerals, choking them out. Because it emerges so early in the spring it has a developmental advantage and can take over large spaces.



2. **Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) – NON-NATIVE**

Found along our stream banks and in the woodlands, garlic mustard is a native of Europe and easily out-competes our native plants in forest communities and along spring banks where there is often disturbed soil, which it likes. Many early blooming native plants that complete their life cycles in the spring time (ephemerals) occur in the same habitat. Wildlife species that depend on these early natives for foliage, pollen, nectar, fruits, seeds, and roots are denied these important food sources when garlic mustard takes over.



3. **Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) – NATIVE**

Look for these native beauties in our woodlands. Virginia bluebells are a spring ephemeral, which means they complete their above ground life cycle in the spring and will go dormant in the summer. If you visit LREC in April it is hard to miss these beautiful native flowers. (Note: Learn more about Virginia bluebells on page 5.)



4. **Spring beauties (*Claytonia virginica*) – NATIVE**

Find these sweet tiny ephemerals in our woodland. One of the first native flowers to appear, they will easily naturalize and form colonies over time. If you choose to plant these in your yard for spring interest, make sure you wait until the foliage dies back before mowing. Their roots are small rounded corms, which are edible and have been described as tasting like water chestnuts.



5. **Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) – NON-NATIVE**

Found in woodland and prairie areas, this beastly beauty is a native of Eastern Europe and parts of the Middle East. Star of Bethlehem is a surprisingly aggressive little plant that is very deceiving with its innocent flowers.



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6. **Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja coccinea*) – NATIVE**

Find this plant in our North and South Prairies. This native spring bloomer can actually act as a parasite, penetrating nearby plant roots. The brilliant red, orange, and yellow colors we enjoy when we see Indian paintbrush are actually the bracts (modified or reduced leaves) of the flower and not the flower itself, which is tiny and can be found in the axils of the bracts.



7. **Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) – NON-NATIVE**

Found at LREC in the North Woods, periwinkle is native to Europe. *Vinca* has escaped and found its way into many wild places in Missouri. Very aggressive, it can form large mats, smothering native flora.



8. **May apple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) – NATIVE**

Found in the woodlands, these single flowers develop only on plants with two leaves and may be hard to see unless you pull the leaves aside. The bloom develops from the axil of the two leaf stems. The ripe fruits are edible if you can get to them before the raccoons do.



9. **False garlic (*Nothoscordum bivalve*) – NATIVE**

False garlic is found in the woodlands, and is a tiny native lily and resembles other small lilies like garlic. It lacks the odor of garlic, hence its common name.



10. **Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) – NATIVE**

Jack-in-the-pulpit is found in our woodlands. It is an interesting native plant with “Jack” — a club like structure called a *spadix*—inside the “pulpit” or *spathe*. The *spadix* has the tiny green to purple flowers.



References:

Plant Conservation Alliance web site: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/>

Dennison, Edgar. 2008. *Missouri Wildflowers*. 6th edition. Missouri Department of Conservation: Jefferson City, MO.



Litzsinger Road Ecology Center is now on Facebook!

Go to <http://tinyurl.com/lrec-facebook> and join us for updates, discussions, photos, and more!

Registration open for Summer 2010 teacher professional development workshops. Learn more at: <http://www.litzsinger.org/profdev.html>.



Photo by Eddie Jones.

Calendar Commentary

This is the photo for April 2010 from the LREC Calendar.

Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)

Height: 1.5 to 2 feet

Bloom time: **March–April**

Bloom color: **Blue (pink and white forms exist too.)**

A native Missouri wildflower, Virginia bluebells can be found throughout the state. They prefer moist, rich soils in woods and floodplains. This perennial is an early bloomer, forming clumps with loose clusters of trumpet-shaped blue flowers. By mid-summer, the foliage dies down and the plant enters a dormant stage. Here at LREC, bluebells can be seen scattered throughout the south woods.

References:

Denison, Edgar. 2008. *Missouri Wildflowers*. 6th edition. Missouri Department of Conservation: Jefferson City, MO.

Kemper Center for Home Gardening web site: <http://www.mobot.org/gardeninghelp/plantinfo.shtml>.