

Roots, Shoots & tiny green thumbs

Milner Gardens and local schools team up on popular program

Do we get gloves to wear?

"I asked one little fellow, 'No, it's okay to get your hands dirty — you can wash up afterwards,'"

explained his mentor. (Letting dirty, along with learning about horticulture (read gardening), science, and the environment from the ground up is what the *Roots and Shoots* program at Milner Gardens and Woodland is all about.

Roots and Shoots is an intergenerational gardening initiative brought to Milner Gardens and Woodland by Candice Coghill, the plant propagator and children's education programmer at the gardens. It is patterned, with modifications for our climate and soil, on the program operating at Gamble Gardens in Palo Alto, CA.

"It's about sharing the joy and knowledge of gardening and giving children positive attitudes towards aging," says one of that program's founders.

Roots and Shoots puts together volunteer mentors (the roots) and elementary school children (the shoots) to work with one another to learn about something that may not be on every family's agenda these days — gardening and growing things and how they all work together.

This first year of the program, two Grade 3 classes from Arrowview Elementary School spend two hours a week working and learning in the food garden, and exploring the surrounding gardens and woodland.

One of their goals being to experience the growth of a plant from seed to edible produce, the shoots, who planted their chosen vegetable seeds at an early session this spring, will care for the plants, observe their development and return for one visit in September to "harvest" their produce.

On the day this old root visited, the busy shoots were examining Mason bee houses, learning about the benefits bees bring to a garden and, using their math to estimate how many bees would emerge from the rows of holes in a bee nesting house. At another table, each student's gardening journal lay open as they



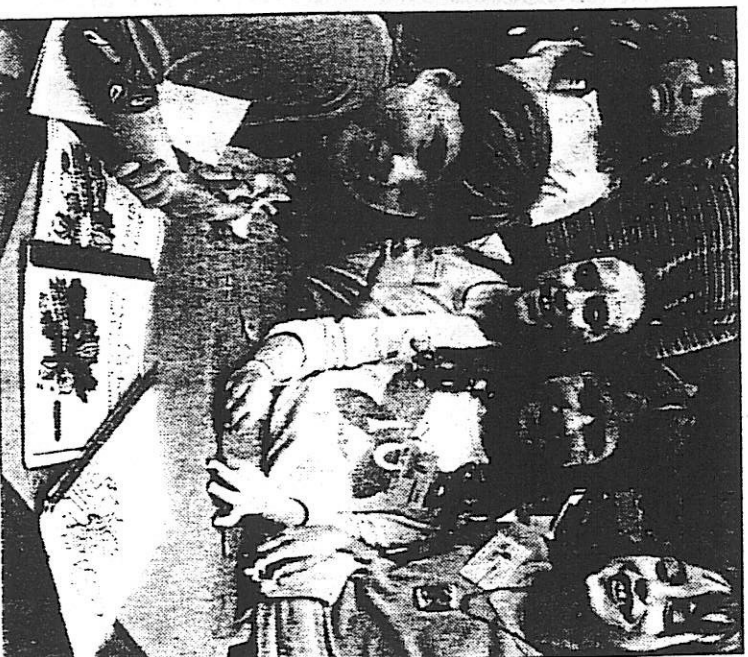
WHILWAVS

NANCY WHELAN

investigated real blossoms to learn and record the various parts of a flower.

Along one fence, shoots were working with their mentor to weed and cultivate an area before transplanting some nasturtiums. Over at the other side, the shoots were busy transplanting some native varieties in the native food garden patch and were looking up the uses made of different parts of the plants in old and current cultures. Along with these activities, the shoots were finding out about plants that help one another by keeping insects and disease at bay in the garden, in other words, companion planting.

"The whole approach is organic, and about not using pesticides," said their teacher, Jan Norton. "We want the students to go home and talk to their par-



ents about these ideas."

When I asked Erica what she liked best about the *Roots and Shoots* program, she enthusiastically answered, "I like everything!"

Kasandra most enjoyed her mentor Mrs. Courtney and the forest walks.

Ryan's favorite job was watering.

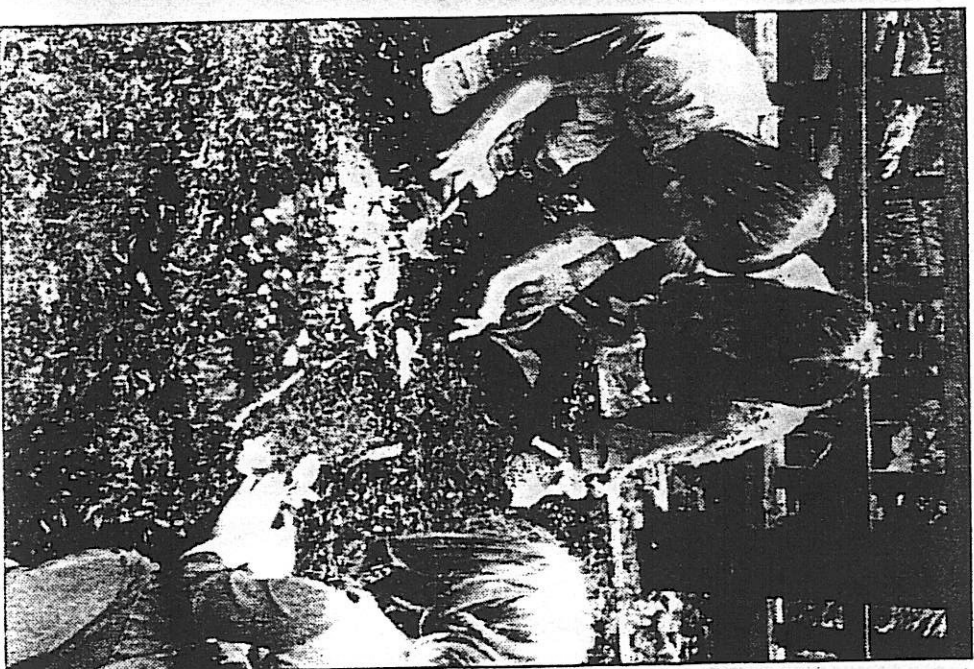
"I've planted strawberries, radishes, beans, tomatoes, red hot chili peppers, and a tobacco plant!"

He was talking about nicotiana, whose fragrant white flowers open at night.

"What I like is being involved with the children

and learning along with them," Martha Pow said.

I had the distinct feeling that *Roots and Shoots* was doing exactly what Candice Coghill had in mind.



NANCY WHELAN PHOTOS

STUDENTS IN THE *Roots and Shoots* program (clockwise from top) record information in their journals. Ryan shows off his nicotiana plant. Garden mentor Joan Doyle helps some shoots look up information about native plant foods. Arrowview students practice cultivating and transplanting in the food gardens.

