

Give Children a Chance to Love the Earth Before Asking Them to Save it

by Landere Naisbitt, Outreach Coordinator

“To teach and practice a stewardship ethic. To promote ecological, economic, and community health for this and future generations,” are central to what outreach focuses on within our mission.

Programs like our monthly Caring for the Land Workshops clearly align well. An incredible cast of local workshop leaders teach stewardship skills relevant to backyards and beyond, sharing their knowledge to help us all become better caretakers of the place we call home. Topics range from blueberry field management to soil health to wildlife habitat and more. Check out our website to learn more.

Other programs like Wild Sun Catchers (cohosted by BHHT and Blue Hill Public Library), while also tied directly to our mission, sometimes aren't as obvious and might be perceived differently as they are designed for kids and are inherently full of hands-on experiences, stories, and songs. Are we teaching stewardship? Yes! These activities just make it more accessible and fun! Monthly programs are crafted to create an atmosphere of celebration and learning that is memorable, engages the imagination and the senses. Children often learn best this way. It does look different from our adult programming that is more didactic and straight to the point. I like David Sobel's advice. This doesn't mean that children can't take responsibility right now for caring for the earth and its inhabitants, but actions taken should be within their zone of proximal development and instill hope and love, not stress about the environment. Building relationships with plants, cultivating empathy for insects, planting pollinator gardens, tending to bluebird boxes are all great fits for young stewards. Offering experiences that are informative and empowering but also enchanting is important in childhood. During Wild Sun Catcher's programming we try to do this. We help children and families build a relationship with local plants such as Goldenrod, Willow, Shadbush, Dandelions, and many more, all of which grow on the Blue Hill Peninsula in abundance. One of the program's core objectives is sustainability. We focus on plants that are okay to harvest in respectful amounts. We wouldn't invite Lady Slipper, for example, into this particular type of education! (We do, however, have a wonderful lady slipper scavenger hunt on the



Making a goldenrod oxymel in August for Wild Sun Catchers



Learning to identify what nibbled on the acorns at Wild Sun Catchers in September.

BHHT website if that is where your interest lies!) Plants have many relationships with other species and these are introduced as well. Did you know Willow is a host to the Viceroy butterfly and an important early flowering tree for pollinators? Goldenrod is essential for Monarchs fueling up to migrate south and it also provides seeds to goldfinches in the fall. Shadbush provide berries to countless migrating birds and other wildlife and Dandelion tap roots bring up nutrients from deep in the soil to support more shallow growing plants around them. We propagate plants like native Willow and send them home for families to establish in their own backyards which carry on stewardship practices beyond the program. Right now, children are learning to know and love and be thankful for what is around them in the natural world so that when the time comes for them to choose to participate in conservation perhaps as donors, educators, easement holders, etc. they are ready and full of love to do so. It's hard to want to save and protect something if there is no emotional and personal attachment to it. If you don't know what Goldenrod is or have never noticed the Shadbush blooming in the spring, how can you care what happens to them? "We are playing the long game," as one of our donors said recently, by laying a foundation for pro environmental behavior through place-based education. Becoming ecologically literate citizens is so important in this digital/virtual age and programs like Wild Sun Catchers are helping younger generations to not forget all that is growing and living amongst us. If you see us eating dandelion pesto, sipping rosehip tea, making sumac necklaces, and tossing seed balls, this is only one (magical) part of the larger picture that helps inspire a conservation mindset at the end of the day.