

Kids Korner

Bugs, Dirt, Plants Fascinate Kids



"Who likes bugs?" Wilbur Siegrist asked. He is the guy with the funny hat made from newsprint spray-painted green and decorated with a bird's nest and bird in it.

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff
BRICKERVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — "Who likes to get your hands dirty?" Wilbur Siegrist asked about 100 youngsters on Tuesday.

Cheers and a wave of hands answered in the affirmative.

That's exactly what the participants at Esbenshade's Garden Center got to do when they attended Kid's Day.

They examined good bugs and bad bugs. They listened as children's author Toni Albert explained how to make a rain forest in a bottle. They planted a pot of flowers to take home and even got to take a few good bugs home.

"I liked the bugs best," said Paige Carr of Lutz.

So did a lot of other kids, but some didn't like them at all.

When Siegrist released a swarm of ladybugs — considered good bugs — some children shrieked

and covered their faces, but others greeted the advent with enthusiastic yells.

Siegrist and other participants wore hats made from crumpled newsprint sprayed green. A bird's nest and a bird perched in the moss wrapped around the hat's brim.

Ten-year-old Ashley liked listening to author Toni Albert talk about nature and the interesting ways to make "your own little garden."

"You can make a woodland garden from things growing wild in the lawn and woods," Ms. Albert said. "People call some of these plants weeds, but a weed is only a plant growing where it is unwanted. Weeds can be really pretty plants."

Ms. Albert suggested using containers such as an old shoe or an old tin in which to grow plants.

You can make an ecopond by digging a hole, dropping an old dishpan into it, and filling with water.

But the highlight of Ms. Albert's talk was her instructions on how to take a plastic green soda bottle and turn it into a miniature rainforest.

Ms. Albert planted one about nine months ago and has never needed to water it, but it looks like it is raining inside and the plants are growing.

"I am going to plant one when I get home," several children said.

Ms. Albert's book, "The Remarkable Rainforest," includes many activities for those interested in rainforests. The book and 35 others that teach about nature and caring for the earth by the same author are available at bookstores.

"Good bugs are like friends," Siegrist said.

Children yelled out the names of some good bugs that they knew. These included ladybugs, ants, praying mantis, bees, and butterflies.

The praying mantis egg sac contains about 200 eggs, but not all the



The free event included an opportunity for children to select flowers to plant in a pot to take along home with them.

eggs will hatch. When praying mantis are little, they eat small bugs, but as they grow, they keep eating larger bugs such as grasshoppers.

You can buy good bugs to put in your garden to make it healthier. Soil with lots of earthworms and good bugs is usually a good place to grow a garden because they make holes in the soil that helps oxygen to enter the ground.

The good bugs eat bad bugs that kill plants. Some of the bad bugs are so tiny that they can barely be seen. These include white fly and aphids.

Jane Johnson helped the kids plant their own gardens. She told

them how plants need air, water, and food to survive.

Each child was given a fiber pot. They could select their own flowers from a variety of petunias, marigolds, dusty miller, and other kinds. They even got a garden stick with their name on it to mark the flowers.

Esbenshade's Garden Center, 546 E. 28th Division Highway near Lutz plans to hold more events for children. For more information, call (717) 626-7007.

"Gardening can be a valuable learning tool if the child is left the responsibility to care for the plants," Siegrist said.



Participants at the Kid's Day event fed the goldfish in the water lily pond display at Esbenshades.

Smart Stuff

WITH TWIG WALKINGSTICK

Where are all the honey bees?

Tiny insects, called varroa mites and tracheal mites, have been making the honey bees really sick.

Mites are nearly everywhere, but they are so small that you need a microscope to see them. Varroa mites (say va-ROW-ah) bite bees and suck their blood, just like ticks bite dogs. Mites grab bees in spots the bees can't reach to get them off. As the mites take the bees' blood, the bees begin to feel really yucky.

Tracheal mites (say TRAY-key-al) hide in special tubes that bees use to breathe. The mites lay their eggs in the tubes, especially the ones that get oxygen to the bees' wings. The eggs are so big that they nearly block off the tubes. Because the bees aren't getting enough oxygen to their wings, they can't fly to get food.

With the varroa mites taking the bees' blood and the tracheal mites blocking the air passages, the honey bees were too weak to fight off viruses and other infections. A lot of the honey bees have died from these infections.

But don't worry — our scientist friends are looking for ways to stop the mites. A simple mixture of sugar and solid vegetable shortening might be the answer. Scientists aren't sure why, but the shortening seems to stop the mite attacks. Beekeepers put the sugary mix into the hives, and because bees don't like outside stuff in their house, they clean up the mess by eating the sugar. The shortening gets all over them — which keeps those mites away!

Scientifically yours, Twig

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