

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gaffield Children’s Garden Grand Opening

Children’s garden helps kids reconnect with nature in a playful way

When: Sunday, September 13, 1-4 pm

Where: Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 N. Dixboro, Ann Arbor, MI 48105 (734.647.7600)

Cost: Free and open to the public. Refreshments served.

Kids of all ages are invited to the grand opening this September of Gaffield Children’s Garden, a unique space for play and learning that will inspire children to reconnect with nature in a playful and educational way.

The garden features more than fifteen special areas and garden spaces (see below). These include a “sensational garden” to encourage kids to use all their senses; a natural builders garden where children can build structures and objects out of twigs, logs, pieces of bark, and other natural material; a habitat garden for exploring and imagining the homes of wild animals; a butterfly garden for attracting and encouraging butterflies in all of their life stages; secret spaces for children to find and create their own places in the garden; and much more. Other elements include signage, sculpture, and benches throughout for children and parents.

Apart from the garden’s many special zones an important takeaway for children and adults, according to Matthaei Botanical Gardens & Nichols Arboretum director Bob Grese, is that it offers kids a learning experience they can bring home and implement in their own gardens. “We’ve designed the garden in a way that we hope will inspire parents to think about how they could make their home yards more playful,” Grese says. “This might range from designating a wild corner of the yard that children claim as their own to working with their children to create a vegetable garden.”

The garden was also conceived in part to help remedy the troubling disconnect between kids and nature. In contrast to earlier generations, today’s children often have very little direct contact with nature.

Such contact is necessary for children to develop caring attitudes about the environment as adults, notes Grese. “We’ve focused this garden on hands-on activities to encourage children to explore, experiment, and discover the wonder of the natural world,” he says. “The Gaffield Children’s Garden is a complement to our other children-focused trails that also engage children in learning about the rich diversity of Michigan.” Grese hopes that the Children’s Garden and

these other places will be the starting point for children to explore and discover the intricacies of the natural world on their own.

Grese foresees the garden helping to slow the trend of children spending less and less time in nature. “It will engage children not by preaching to them but by providing fun opportunities for getting their hands wet or dirty, digging in the sand, constructing a rustic home for a toad or a woodland fairy, building with logs and bark, or creating works of art out of plant parts,” he says. “We may not be able to decisively reverse a trend, but we can reach out to children one at a time and provide them with magical, meaningful experiences in the garden.”

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Gaffield Children’s Garden features:

- **Sensational Garden**—A garden to delight the senses, with plants that invite kids to touch, smell, and observe
- **Natural Builders garden**—this garden area inspires children to build towers and special structures, create patterns and familiarize themselves with the feel of branches, rocks, logs, pieces of bark, and other natural materials
- **Butterfly Garden**—this garden is designed to attract butterflies in all of their life stages and will showcase the relationships between plants and these beautiful winged insects
- **Wayfinder’s Maze**—fun and educational, the maze helps kids develop problem-solving skills through finding their way to the center of a series of twisted paths
- **Picnic Plaza**—a shaded area with picnic tables and amenities like recycling, and compost bins. A great place for a snack and good views of many of the other garden areas
- **Seasonal Plants**—the plants in these gardens are organized by season and planted with bold varieties to demonstrate the possibilities of seasonal variety in home gardens
- **Animal Habitats Hiking Trail**—a rustic trail forming a shaded loop on the outer edges of the garden. Here, children can look for signs of wildlife signs and become more aware of nature as a home for a multitude of wildlife species
- **Bird’s Nest**—from inside this giant bird’s nest kids can imagine what it’s like to be a fledgling in the nest of a large bird
- **Entry Tunnel**—eighteen musclewood trees, trained to arch overhead and shade the path, flank the main walk into the garden areas
- **Groovy Grove**—a grove of sumac trees arranged to mimic orchard plantings will provide a shady, peaceful retreat in the garden’s center
- **Secret Places**—children love to find their own special secret places. Here, nooks and crannies abound—hideaway spots that kids can adopt as their own
- **Natural Art Gallery**—a place for children to craft, construct, and display creations or artwork out of kid-sized natural materials
- **Fairy and Troll Garden**—we’ve been told that our garden is already the home to woodland “fairies.” In the fairy and troll garden, children can build homes and

places from pieces of bark, twigs, small stones, and other natural materials for fairies, trolls, toads, and other creatures of the woods

- **Hillside Classroom**—this will be a gathering space for plays, storytelling, and impromptu performances of all kinds
- **Growing Garden**—our food and flower garden introduces children to the many varieties of plants grown for food and shows kids how they can grow their own food at home
- **Recycled Elements**—don't throw it away! In this area we've incorporated salvaged parts throughout, reusing and recycling materials rather than adding to the landfill. Look for the old lab sinks in the digging pit area