

The Gardens at Alouette Tree Farm Ltd.

In this fast-paced, technology-driven culture a chasm is forming between the natural world and humanity. With each passing generation it is becoming evident that Western society is no longer familiar with the intricacies of the environment that sustains them and in turn needs humankind to be its sustainers. The California School Garden Network has identified this issue and seen in their research that “studies point to significant benefits gained from garden-based learning including:

- significant gains in overall GPA in math and science.
- improved classroom management and reduced discipline problems.
- significant increase in children’s consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- improved agricultural and ecological literacy.
- greater concern and willingness to care for living things.
- improved attitudes towards school and improved interpersonal relationships”

(California School Garden Network, <http://www.cfaitc.org/gardensforlearning/pdf/supplement.pdf>).

We at Alouette Tree Farm Ltd desire to use the natural resources we have available in order to partner with schools and community groups in an educational setting in order to see a shift towards sustainable living practices. Our vision is as follows:

*For students to have the opportunity to learn about health and nutrition in a truly hands on approach;
to gain an understanding as to where food comes from and how it gets from the farm to their plate;
to appreciate the practices of sustainable living and healthy eating;
to explore the natural world and learn from it;
to train students to be stewards of the environment that they may both reap from it and guard it from depletion;
to see and invest in the “bigger picture” of maintaining the environment for the future generations;
to practice sustainable habits such as composting and recycling;
to participate in the “Plant a Row - Grow a Row” program in which we grow and harvest food for our local food bank;
to provide a safe location for agricultural learning that will encourage self-confidence and produce healthy, educated young leaders who can work towards the betterment of our community and all humankind.*

We hope to fulfill this vision by partnering with schools within the Lower Mainland and Greater Vancouver Area through educational workshops that help meet the curricular requirements of each class. These workshops will take place throughout the school year in the form of subsequent field trips to the large garden at Alouette Tree Farm Ltd. On occasion, field trip expenditures are covered by the parents of the students attending; however, to offset some of the costs the individual school boards may choose to designate funds at their discretion.

We recommend each class/group come to three workshops throughout the year: mid-Spring (April/May), early Summer (late June) and Fall. This allows for the students to watch their garden grow and change throughout the year and to appreciate eating seasonally. Each workshop will be hosted and

led by a facilitator who will gauge the curriculum towards each age group. We encourage open communication between the facilitator and the teachers/educators attending the workshop so that we can align the experience towards each class's specified learning outcomes. We are confident that gardening and sustainable living practices are applicable for all age groups and we are eager to accommodate students from pre-Kindergarten up to high school as well as students involved in extra-curricular programs or clubs.

There are many opportunities for the students to be involved with their garden when they are not attending a workshop making this a truly cross-curricular experience. Students will explore math and science concepts; learn about nutrition and pursuing an active lifestyle; create art projects; sew gardening gloves in home economics... the possibilities are endless! Garden projects can be completed within the classroom and then brought to the garden to be installed and/or displayed. This may include painting fence pickets, making plant signs and labels, constructing benches, birdhouses, fountains, sun dials, windmills, etc. There is a full spectrum of projects available that tie in with secondary school electives such as woodworking, metal working, home economics (sewing, cooking), etc. Classes can also gather worms and organic materials to be added to our compost or even build their own compost bin to "feed" their plants.

The benefits to this partnership are unlimited! Because the garden will be off-site from your education centre, Alouette Tree Farm Ltd is eliminating the initial financial outlay that would be incurred by designing, building, planting and maintaining an on-site school garden, as well as the ongoing expenditure of hiring a full or part time gardener to manage and care for the needs of the plot. Alouette Tree Farm's garden is situated away from the public eye and on private property. We are certain that vandalism will be non-existent. Also, our staff will care for the garden year 'round whereas a school employee or volunteer would have to maintain an on-site school garden throughout the summer months, over holidays and during weekends.

As well, Alouette Tree Farm is situated on 15 acres of land in the ALR. This allows us the freedom to build gardens and additional student resources without being limited by a school-designated plot of land that may infringe on playgrounds or play fields. Our rural setting is more natural than typical urban school centres and plays host to a variety of friendly, desirable wildlife such as owls, bees, insects, bats, birds, etc. Children may very well see squirrels, raccoons or deer! Our rustic location also allows for us to practice organic and natural farming without the onslaught of pollution that exists in the metropolitan areas.

We anticipate opening a Maple Ridge chapter of the "Grow a Row – Plant a Row" program whose purpose is to grow and harvest food designated for the local soup kitchen and food bank (see their website at www.growarow.org). The effects of the recent economic downturn are still being felt by many individuals and families within our community and the Friends in Need food bank has noticed a substantial increase of people using their services but a decrease in supplies and donations. Our desire is to inform students about the need that exists and give them the opportunity to meet those needs in a practical way. A portion of the garden will be allocated for the food bank and soup kitchen and children will be able to plant, maintain and harvest the food to be donated.

We are pleased to present additional field trip opportunities to increase the educational encounters at our farm. We offer field trips for children aged 3 to grade 5 for our Christmas tree farm and pumpkin patch. Discounts are given when classes attend both the gardening workshops and an additional field trip.

Thank you for considering Alouette Tree Farm Ltd for your school's off-site garden "classroom"! We invite you to come along with us in this new endeavour which will inspire greater appreciation for and attention to the beautiful, natural environment we have been given. We look forward to discussing this further.

Sincerely,

Janelle K. Hildebrand
Manager

Alouette Tree Farm Ltd.
23083 132nd Ave.
Maple Ridge, BC V4R 0A8

604.866.7413
j_hildebrand@live.ca