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LIVING

Camels Hump Middle School students learn from nature

BY CHARLOTTE ALBERS, FREE PRESS CORRESPONDENT • SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2010

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CHARLOTTE ALBERS, for the Free Press
Eighth grade students help plant a serviceberry tree in the Native Garden in June.

To Learn More

Wise on Weeds: The Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has developed a public education program called Wise on Weeds and is actively working with schools, towns and individuals to identify and remove non-native invasive plants such as burning bush, Japanese barberry, Norway maple, buckthorn, bush honeysuckle and more. Visit www.nature.org/vermont/weeds for fact sheets and suggested alternatives.

Bringing Nature Home: Author Doug Tallamy, chair of the entomology and wildlife ecology departments at the University of Delaware, champions the use of native plants in his book, "Bringing Nature Home" (Timber Press). Go to www.bringingnaturehome.net for research findings and plant lists.

Children and Nature Network: Get regional updates on what's happening with outdoor initiatives around the country, www.childrenandnature.org. Richard Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods" (Algonquin) is co-founder and chairman of this organization.

Raise butterflies, collect stones, watch clouds, fill a birdbath, plant a garden — sounds easy, right? According to Richard Louv, author of the national bestseller "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder" these kinds of activities just aren't happening for many kids and young adults.

First published in 2005, it's since been revised and expanded, translated into nine languages and published in 13 countries. For anyone who works with kids, the message is clear — get outside and experience nature.

Outdoor educators have long known the value of experiential learning. Getting outside for field study can yield discoveries for students of any age.

Sandra Fary, a science teacher at Camels Hump Middle School in Richmond, did 36 field studies last year.

"The more I can get kids out in the natural world and have them feel connected to their place, the better stewards they're going to be," she said. "The more passionate they are, the more respect they have, the better decision-makers they're going to be about our environment."

Her seventh and eighth grade students helped plan, design and plant a school garden using native species. Their objective was to create an outdoor classroom that could be used by both the elementary and middle school students. It's called Native Garden, where nature is the teacher and getting dirty is encouraged.

Classroom without walls

For the past couple years Fary's students have been part of a community effort to reduce the impact of non-native invasive plants from natural areas in Richmond's Floodplain Forest. Students have learned about Japanese knotweed, goutweed and Dame's Rocket by digging and cutting these and other plants along the Winooski River as a community service, working with the Richmond Conservation Commission, the Richmond Land Trust, [Vermont](#) Youth Conservation Corps and The Nature Conservancy's Invasive Plant Coordinator, Sharon Plumb.

The work on targeting invasive plants led to discussion about indigenous flora, and the idea for a Native Garden was born.

"We wanted to make a garden where students could learn about native plants and the valuable role they play in healthy, functioning ecosystems," Fary said. Her eighth grade Sequoia Team started researching plants and looking closely at food webs.

This story appeared on page C1 of Saturday's Burlington Free Press

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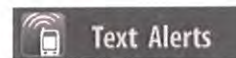
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