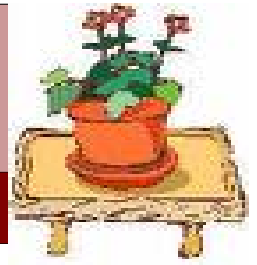


The Children's Corner



By Cathy Cote



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail on Milkweed; photo by Master Gardener Joan Valade

The "lazy" days of summer are finally here. For many of us, the heat of the day will find us seeking relief in the shadier corners of our gardens, while the warm evenings and clear, rosy sunsets beg us to linger outdoors, if only for just a *little* longer. Tasks like watering, weeding, and fertilizing are still necessary but our pace is slower, less urgent. The kids and grandkids have been out of school for more than a month and have long forgotten the rigors of keeping to a

schedule. On these hot, perfect days they seem to instinctively crave activities that involve water. But how much beach, pool, or sprinkler time can any gardener take before their green charges begin to whisper that they, too, need attention? How can you manage to enjoy time in your garden while also spending time with the kids? Here is one solution that I think you will both enjoy...

One unmistakable benefit of these hot midsummer days is that many summer flowering plants are at their peak: plants like Buddleia, Echinacea, Gaillardia, and Liatris are in full bloom. This time of year is pure heaven for the insects and birds that rely on nectar for their primary food source. So why not take your children or grandchildren on a pollinator hunt in your own garden, or in a public garden nearby? It's a fact of nature: kids love bugs. Even children who appear to be a little bit frightened by insects are often still fascinated by them. So take the opportunity to teach them about the "good bugs" in your garden? We all know that pollinators are critical to the life cycle of plants and ultimately to our food supply. The variety of butterflies, moths, bees, wasps, and flies that fill the pollinator niche in our landscape is really quite astounding. Now is a perfect time to observe them in action.

Start by doing a little fun research with your child. Pick up a copy of the National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Insects and Spiders or the Peterson First Guide to Caterpillars by Amy Bartlett Wright. Or stop by your local library and borrow a book or two. Make sure that any guide books you use are geared towards insects of the Northeastern U.S! There is also a website that makes simple work of identifying butterflies and moths. For example, www.butterfliesandmoths.com offers an easy point-and-click map search that allows the user to focus on a particular state and county; ultimately, you will be presented with a list of butterflies and moths that frequent your area. Clicking on any taxonomic or common name will bring up full color pictures along with a written description of that species' habitat and habits.

Print a few pictures off of the computer, grab your books (and perhaps a camera), and take your children outdoors on a sunny afternoon for a buggy scavenger hunt. (This can even be fun to do if you don't have kids!) Some children may enjoy taking along a drawing pad and some pencils or crayons to record what they see. Or perhaps you'll find that you have a budding photographer in the family. Along the way, share your knowledge of the plants that these important insects are feeding on. You might also consider taking a field trip to visit the perennial beds at the URI Botanical Garden, located on the site of the Cooperative Extension Education Center, 3 East Alumni Avenue, Kingston,

RI. If you do, don't forget to stop by the water garden where you may very well catch a few dragonflies resting on the rocks.

A garden is more than the plants that you place in it. A healthy garden is a thriving community of plants and animals and insects all interacting with each other and their environment. Help your child to see these relationships, and you'll be well on your way... to growing a gardener.