

Public Garden

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**CHILDREN'S GARDENS
AND OTHER YOUTH
PROGRAMMING**

Growing the IMAGINATION



JULIE MOIR MESSERVY

When I was a youngster, my stay-at-home mother of seven children would send us out to play every day after school. No matter the weather, we'd spend an hour or more exploring, riding bikes, making forts, or playing ball while she'd lock the door and take a long, luxurious bath. I credit my mom with developing my love of nature and with my abiding delight in designing landscapes and gardens.

As we've learned, time spent playing outside just doesn't happen as much anymore. Add parents' fearfulness regarding child abduction, insects carrying Lyme disease and West Nile virus, and over-exposure to the sun, to rampant over-scheduling of sports and lessons and too much time in front of televisions and computers. The result: kids aren't playing enough in the out-of-doors.

JMMDS, our landscape architecture and design studio, has developed a passion for creating spaces where children can not only marvel at the taste of fresh-picked berries and learn about the industrious attributes of beavers, but also just get out to play in spaces that are imaginative, educational, and safe. We are proud to share details about three children's gardens that provide inspiring and unique outdoor experiences for children.

Heritage Museum and Gardens' *Hidden Hollow*

Hidden Hollow, the children's garden at Heritage Museum and Gardens in Sandwich, Massachusetts, began as a dry kettle hole and has been transformed into one of the first certified Nature Explore Classrooms in New England. Surrounded by lush groves of rhododendrons and hollies, children can build forts, eat blueberries, explore woodland paths, and learn about nature.

In this garden are twelve distinct areas for specific programmatic requirements based on the idea of "Hidden Pictures®" from *Highlights for Children*. Natural motifs, like pinecones, sticks, acorn caps, and fairy circles, are seen in plain view from an

CREATE is the nature art area at Heritage Museum and Gardens.

Overlook that was created to look out over the space. The “nature art area” became *CREATE*, a pinecone-shaped space with a bluestone floor and hand-carved pinecone tables with pine slab tops. Wooden mushroom stools are set in a fairy-ring pattern around the teacher’s central stump to form *GATHER* in the midst of native lowbush blueberries. Additional spaces are named *CLIMB*, *SPLASH*, *BUILD*, and *LISTEN*. Handicap-accessible boardwalks, branching like a tree, guide visitors to the main play areas.

Shore Country Day School’s Inspiration Garden

Shore Country Day School in Beverly, Massachusetts, dedicated the Inspiration Garden in 2010. Created to honor the memory of several young graduates who passed away, the quarter-acre garden is a contemplative setting in the middle of a busy campus.

Inspired by the school’s mascot, this landscape is a miniature beaver meadow, complete with waterway, dam, lodge, tunnel, and wet meadow plantings. The garden offers space for school gatherings along the outside edge of the garden, and for solitary contemplation, with

seating around the maple tree and under the lodge-like structure in the quietest corner of the garden. The garden is used by music, art, and science classes and offers a quiet zone where inspiration can flourish in the heart of the campus.

Massachusetts Horticultural Society’s Weezie’s Garden

A one-acre garden at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in Wellesley, Massachusetts, Weezie’s Garden was designed in the form of unfurling fern fronds that represent the expansive growth of the developing child.

The outer “tendrils” offer a series of quiet activities, including a Maypole Garden surrounded by Japanese maples, the Big Red Chair garden, a Bluebird Garden with mountain laurel “nests,” and the Butterfly Garden with its masses of color and twiggy butterfly bench. In the center of the space are three more active play spaces: the Treehouse on the Mountain, where kids can climb while parents can see across the whole site; Tortoise Island, designed with different kinds of water play (including pumping stations, a water garden, and water dripping down stones); and a rocky sand “pool.”

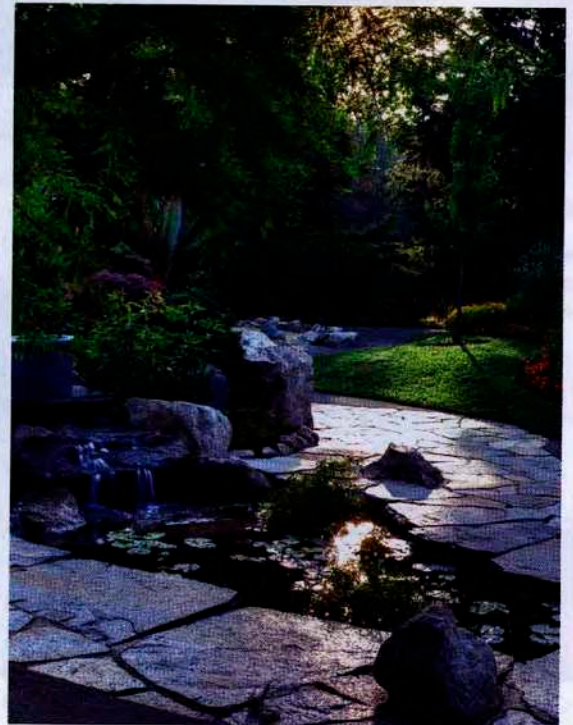
Joyous and Rewarding Work

The response to these children’s gardens has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Weezie’s Garden was named “Best Children’s Outdoor Play Area” by the *Boston Parents Paper*. At Hidden Hollow, museum administrators reported that overall museum attendance increased by 40 percent in the first year of the children’s garden, and visitor questionnaires were 100 percent positive about the hands-on activities for children, the low-tech natural materials, and the respect for nature fostered in this imaginative space. Best of all, however, is knowing that tens of thousands of children are enjoying magical and unforgettable experiences in the out-of-doors. Designing gardens for children is joyous and rewarding work.

Julie Moir Messervy is a distinguished landscape designer, author, lecturer, and principal of Julie Moir Messervy Design Studio (JMMDS) in Saxtons River, Vermont. She designed the Toronto Music Garden in collaboration with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, as well as residential and institutional landscapes around the country. Her latest book is Landscaping Ideas That Work (Taunton Press, November 2013).



(Above) Beaver-inspired structures lead the way into the Inspiration Garden at Shore Country Day School.



(Right) One of several water features that grace Weezie’s Garden.