

# Garden History

The germ of the idea for a school garden sprouted in early **2008**, when a group of parents and kids looked at the spiritless cement runway stretching from Haldane's blacktop to the back stairs and thought... what if?

Together with Haldane's EcoKids group – and with invaluable help from farmer and Haldane parent Dave Llewellyn of [Glynwood](#) – the group began plotting a garden. [Hudson Highlands Land Trust](#) (HHLT) and the [Haldane School Foundation](#) (HSF) were approached for funding, and both organizations approved generous grants to get it built. In the summer of **2009**, students, parents and community members pulled on their boots, rolled up their sleeves, and started digging. Within weeks, a garden worthy of Blue Devil pride was born.

## Initial Growth

In the garden's first year, **2010**, Mrs. Geller's class based a cross-curricular program around Haldane's newest green resource. Her students solicited leftover coffee grounds from local businesses for composting. They planned their own garden bed, researched plants, wrote letters to seed companies, and selected their favorite vegetables to grow. They weeded, watered and watched... Finally, they picked (and ate with relish) what they had grown.

Soon more elementary classes jumped on the bandwagon. Haldane Art teacher Jean Cendali made mosaic "stepping stones" with each of the elementary art classes. In **2011**, students planted a series of "theme beds": an herb garden, a graceful bed of ornamental grasses, a "useful plants" bed, an exotic tropical bed (home to the much-admired banana tree donated by local resident and professional Wave Hill gardener Charles Day), and a perennial sensory bed full of fragrant plants donated by Laurel Rimmer (another professional gardener from the Bronx's famous Wave Hill and a Haldane parent to boot!).

That same year a new vision arose: raised beds on the south side of the path would house garden edibles (vegetables *and* flowers!) and the north side would be home to ornamental annuals and perennials. That spring:

- A presentation by [Cornell Cooperative Extension](#) (CCE) inspired 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to establish a glorious butterfly garden.
- Mrs. Horn's 6th grade Environmental Science class planted an array of flowers known to attract birds. They also hauled soil, spread wood chips (donated by Jerry Allen of Philipstown Tree Service), and positioned bird-attracting shrubs around the garden's perimeter.
- A compost pile – crucial to garden health – was begun by 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students using cafeteria scraps and fallen leaves for mulch.

- Third-grade teacher Simon Dudar and former Haldane Facilities Manager Wayne Robinson designed and built a hand-pumped rain barrel to collect runoff from the playground equipment shed's roof.

The garden was growing so quickly that an official "Garden Handbook" was created as a resource for Haldane teachers, and the Garden Committee started a website and quarterly newsletters to keep the community informed. The Committee also gave teachers a formal tour of the garden, and HHLT conducted a teacher training session.

## Coming to Fruition

By **2012**, the Haldane Garden had become a showpiece of the school campus.

- Impressive autumn scarecrows, leaf rubbings, and even brooms from broom corn (*Sorghum*) were made by students at the start of the school year.
- Sandy McKelvey, director of Hudson Valley Farm to School, began a chef-in-the-classroom bed and Junior Gardeners after-school enrichment class.
- Different elementary classes grew pumpkins and gourds, prolific cucumbers, a "Three Sisters" Native American garden and even experimented with square foot gardening.
- Art began to grow in the garden as well: HSF and HHLT invited local poets Irene O'Garden and Lisa Mechaly to help 4<sup>th</sup> graders write garden-inspired poems. Garden Committee member Melany Campanile hand-painted a collection of smooth round stones to make a "word garden", allowing many wonderful poems and crazy sentences to promptly bloom!
- Led by another Committee member, Lourdes Laifer, funds were raised to buy two picnic tables to use for class garden projects, enjoying the views, and of course, lunching in the garden...
- To maintain all this effort, Flagler Landscaping mowed the garden grass for two seasons, while parent and student volunteers signed up for weekly shifts over summers to water and maintain the garden.

In **2013** garden theme beds continued to grow: the tropical bed became a "Dr. Seuss bed" showcasing unusual, exotic plants; a Native Plants bed replaced the grass garden; a "Bread bed" now displays agriculturally important staple grain crops; and each year 4<sup>th</sup> graders replant the Native American Three Sisters Bed of corn, beans, and squash. The garden has also added two small container gardens: water plants (with Dorito the goldfish!) and carnivorous pitcher plants that students dissect in fall to determine which insects were digested that summer. More 2013 additions:

- The addition of an official garden sign thanks to art teacher Jean Cendali's beautiful paintwork with all the elementary students!
- In honor of spring Eco Week first graders contributed painted tires, cans, and boots to function as recycled (and reusable!) flower planters.
- Committee member Carina Frantz built a living fort of willow branches

- covered in climbing vines for children to crawl through, hide in, and explore!
- Garden Committee members help the [Cold Spring Shady Lane Campaign](#) coordinate the planting and maintenance of new shade trees around the Haldane playground and blacktop funded by the PTA and generous community members.
  - Spring (May) and Fall (October) Garden Months are implemented, coordinated with help from classroom Garden Parents, allowing every class grades K-5 to visit the garden for a lesson during their grade's week.
  - The Middle School Greenhouse is renovated thanks to a grant from HSF and the interior design and volunteer labor of [Philipstown Garden Club](#) (PGC) members.
  - A new Education Shed is constructed in the garden thanks to widespread community donations and the support of a matching HSF grant.
  - Superintendent Dr. Villanti's years of service are celebrated on the eve of his retirement by 6<sup>th</sup> graders planting a Magnolia tree donated by the PTA.

The winter of **2014** saw an expansion of Farm to School by adding a "Farmer in the Classroom" component, which allows farm educator Carolyn Llewellyn to meet with students in the garden before a Chef visits their classroom. Students learn about the cultural history and culinary significance of the vegetable of the month then get to see (and taste!) it growing outside. That spring, 4<sup>th</sup> graders also had the option for the first time to do work in the garden during recess, and a towering climbing vine structure was built by father and son team Paul and Theo Henderson in the garden's courtyard. Beloved school nurse Candy Zgolinski's retirement that year was also celebrated by installing a garden bench (donated and refinished by Danielle Pack-McCarthy) in her honor. And, of course, 2014 was also the year we joined [Facebook](#)!

## Ripe for Learning

In the winter of **2015**, Haldane brought the garden indoors with its first ever K-5 Great Amaryllis Race, based on a wonderful lesson created by another fabulous school garden in Ohio: [Granny's School Garden](#). The amaryllis bulbs were then planted outside and allowed to photosynthesize over summer to be 'raced' against new bulbs the following year. 2015 also saw an expansion of K-6 garden lessons with the appointment of contract garden educators (Carolyn Llewellyn, Sandy McKelvey, Kory Riesterer), whose lessons were shared on the garden's newly designed website. The first annual Strawberry Fest was celebrated in June and a new strawberry bed planted, along with another new 'Prehistoric' theme bed of plants that grew when dinosaurs roamed the earth! The garden committee also experimented with fall row covers to extend the growing season.

In **2016** Mrs. Hartford's 4<sup>th</sup> graders took on the task of designing a brand new composting bin system for the garden! Their yearlong PBL unit culminated in a group of parents (led by Jeff Silverstein) generously helping with construction. The garden was sad to lose one of its grand old Ash trees this year but planted a Serviceberry bush in the Native Plants Bed in honor of outgoing HS Principal

Brian Alm and an espaliered apple tree thanks to Cub Scout Pack 137. Mr. Wick's 6<sup>th</sup> graders experimented with hydroponics in the MS greenhouse and Mrs. Scrocca's 3<sup>rd</sup> graders tapped maple syrup in the Haldane woods, while long time garden committee Chairperson Kory Riesterer retired in spring, handing off responsibilities to incoming Chair Sandy McKelvey.

And the best news yet? Starting **fall 2016** garden education will officially become a regular part of the Elementary School Library program! As part of their weekly library special, each class grades K-5 will also have at least one monthly garden lesson during library time. Thanks go out to Haldane's administration (especially ES Principal Brent Harrington) for supporting this innovative program which more formally integrates garden education into the elementary school day, ensuring rich, experiential garden learning continues for all of Haldane's youngest students.

Haldane's School Garden continues to expand by leaps and bounds. Stop by for a visit soon or better yet, join us in helping to grow children's minds and souls!