

## **Union Elementary School Bird and Butterfly Garden Project Final Report**

The Bird and Butterfly Garden at Union Elementary was completed during the spring and summer of 2008. The garden's purpose is to begin to make up for a lack of natural space around the school and to act as a resource for environmental education.



**Before (Fall 2007)**

During the early spring of 2008, seeds of native bird or butterfly-attracting plants were stratified at a parent volunteer's home so that the seeds would be ready for sowing in April. When the seeds were ready, three parent volunteers and two Union Elementary School teachers worked with the kindergarten and first grade children to sow the seeds in pots for growth indoors. The children and teachers in these classes cared for the seedlings in their classrooms until the end of May, when the plants were hardened off.

Meanwhile, the raised bed for the butterfly garden was prepared by parent, teacher, and community volunteers during work parties on several (usually rainy) weekends in April and May. These volunteers did all aspects of the job from picking stones in a nearby quarry to building the stone wall that formed the raised bed for the garden. Luckily we

had one parent volunteer who was a stone mason to supervise this labor-intensive and time-consuming part of the project!



Once the wall was completed, topsoil was brought in and dumped in the playground. One Saturday, parents and their children convened to move the dirt into the raised bed. Despite an efficient team of shovelers and wheelbarrow-drivers, the bed was not finished by the end of the day. However, one of the third grade classes came to the rescue by blazing through the rest of the job during a school day the following week. A parent took some of left-over stone and made a curving path through the length of the garden.



Once both the bed and the plants were ready, the day for having the children plant their seedlings was scheduled (and got rained out). Another planting day was scheduled (and got rained out). As the school year was coming to an end, we were forced to schedule a weekend day for the planting. Several families came throughout the day to plant the seedlings grown entirely by Union Elementary kindergarten and first graders.





For each week during the summer, a different parent volunteer tended the garden by watering, weeding, and spreading mulch. The initially somewhat spindly seedlings amazed us all by flourishing – and even blooming - by the end of the summer so that by the time school began in August, a garden in full bloom of yellows, purples, pinks, blues and white greeted the returning students and teachers. (Unfortunately we cannot find a picture of this! We will send one this fall so you can see it!) The new kindergarteners took to the garden immediately, loving the stone path leading through flowers that were often taller than they were.

By the time the initial installation of the garden was completed, approximately 60 Union Elementary students, 25 parents and community members, and 10 teachers/staff had been involved. This spring, another group of parents spent time weeding the garden and repairing the stone wall. First graders planted some more seeds for filling in bare spots and planted them into the garden. Although this project is “completed”, there is still a lot of work ahead of us to maintain the garden (especially in its early years). We also hope to involve students in growing more plants from seeds collected from the garden to sell at the yearly plant sale to raise money for continued schoolyard improvement. This money is needed because the Four Winds Institute Schoolyard Improvement grant has inspired a lot of interest among the Union Elementary community to continue to improve this and other parts of the schoolyard!



After (Spring 2009)