

## The Forest Garden from Children's Perspectives

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In Sweden, there are ongoing projects with the aim to create health- and sustainability promoting outdoor environments for preschools. One environment proposed for preschools to establish has been small forest gardens. Forest gardens are multi-layered, polyculture ecosystems designed by humans with the purpose to produce fruit, berries, and edible perennials. Reasons for the interest in forest gardens are several. Apart from the practical benefits such as lower work load and a longer harvest season compared with traditional school gardens, there are also benefits compared to excursions to woodlands and parks, such as the possibility to establish them in the schoolyard or nearby. Although good reasons for promoting forest gardens from adults' perspective, there is a need to investigate children's perspectives.

This paper's aim is to gain an understanding of how school children experience a forest garden and the activities they take part in during their visits with their school class.

This paper is theoretically based on the social studies of childhood tradition. The researchers used participant observation and walk-and-talk interviews to try to get the perspectives of 28 children aged 7 to 9 on the forest garden.

The study shows that children liked to spend time in the forest garden, they enjoyed the way the garden looked, smelled and to harvest and eat berries and leaves. They enjoyed working physically in the garden. Furthermore, they liked the possibility to hang out with their friends. The results show that the forest garden offer learning possibilities that can support the more traditional education in school by offering other, more hands-on learning opportunities where the children explore on their own. Finally, the results suggest that the time spent in the forest garden has contributed to the children's relation to the natural world and show the usefulness of direct experience in developing a framework for understanding and discussing ecological connections.

In a nutshell, using the children's perspectives we can conclude that a forest garden is a multifunctional outdoor environment offering a variety of possibilities for the visiting children.

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