

For immediate release

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N.C. Symposium to Showcase Benefits of Outdoor Classrooms

CHAPEL HILL – The North Carolina Outdoor Classroom Symposium begins Friday, April 8, at the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill.

The symposium will provide more than 120 teachers, school administrators, parent volunteers and non-formal educators with techniques for creating, maintaining and using outdoor classrooms. Presenters will discuss integrating outdoor learning into school curricula. They will offer sessions on designing school gardens, creating natural areas and using the outdoors to connect students to scientific research, food production, health and nutrition.

“Schools across North Carolina are using their school grounds to engage students in learning math, science, language arts and art while meeting curriculum goals and creating an enthusiasm for the outdoors,” said Lisa Tolley, program manager for the N.C. Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs. “Teachers and parents recognize first-hand the positive academic, health and behavioral benefits of outdoor learning.”

Friday morning’s featured speaker is Jane L. Taylor, founding curator of the Michigan 4-H Children’s Garden, which is considered the national model for the design of gardens for children at public garden sites. Closing remarks on Friday will be delivered by Wendy Banning, co-developer and program director of Irvin Learning Farm, a hands-on outdoor learning program at the Triangle Land Conservancy’s 269-acre Irvin Farm Preserve in Chapel Hill. Banning recently co-authored a book with Ginny Sullivan, “Lens on Outdoor Learning,” which documents children’s learning in the outdoors.

“Connections to nature are vital to the human spirit and to health,” said Dr. Peter White, director of the North Carolina Botanical Garden. “This is true for all ages, but it is especially important to begin early, to foster the understanding of the biologically diverse world with which we share this planet. The North Carolina Botanical Garden is honored and delighted to host this important meeting for North Carolina.”

The symposium is sponsored by the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program, the N.C. Botanical Garden, the N.C. Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs, N.C. Cooperative Extension, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, the Environmental Education Fund and others.

Pre-symposium environmental education workshops will be held Thursday. A series of mobile workshops on Saturday will let participants visit school and community gardens in the Triangle. Teachers can earn continuing education credits and all participants can earn credit towards their N.C. Environmental Education Certification. For more information, visit

<http://www.eenorthcarolina.org/outdoorsymposium/2011/about.htm>. You can also follow the symposium’s activities on Facebook [facebook.com/NorthCarolinaEE](https://www.facebook.com/NorthCarolinaEE) or Twitter twitter.com/NorthCarolinaEE with the hashtag #ncocsym. # # #