PLANTS GROW CHILDREN
IN KOOTENAI COUNTY

The Situation
Both parents in many families are working full time outside the home. Therefore, their grade school aged children attend after school programs. In Coeur d'Alene, parents are able to use the School Plus program (which is connected to the school district) during the school year and in the summer to give their children a safe, educational environment during work hours. The employees of the School Plus program are always looking for projects that will be fun for the kids, and give them a learning opportunity.

Our Response:
In the spring of 1994, we approached the School Plus Project leader with a program called "Plants Grow Children" which partners Master Gardeners with teachers to bring the exciting world of plants to grade school children. The goals of the program were: to introduce children to plants and insects, provide site coordinators in the School Plus program with expert gardeners to present the information, and to give Master Gardeners the opportunity to share their experiences and love for gardening with young people. Two veteran Master Gardeners coordinated the scheduling of classes with School Plus. Master Gardeners developed teaching packets and taught classes during July and August of 1994. Teaching packets, including posters and plant viewers, insect parts and puppets, were constructed and stored at the Extension Office so all participating volunteers could access the materials easily. Master Gardeners found the summer schedule offered the advantage of having an abundance of growing plants to use as part of the lessons. While children were planting marigold seeds, for example, they could also be looking at a mature plant with flowers. School Plus site coordinators introduced Master Gardeners and oversaw the classes to provide familiarity and discipline to the children. The program was taught in the Harrison School district during 1994/95 school year, and was offered again in 1995 at the request of the School Plus Program Coordinator.

Achievements
Seven Master Gardeners developed 7 lesson plans in 1994: The Miracle of the Seed; The Fantastic Peanut; The Flower; The Mini-Greenhouse: The Root Viewer; Everyday Insects; Tree-mendous Trees. Some of these were adapted from a similar program in Washington State. All

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of the lessons had a “finished product” the child could share with his/her family such as a seed planted in a cup, an insect magnet, or a realistic model of a flower.

In 1994, 6 Master Gardeners taught 300 children at 4 schools.

In 1995, the School Plus project leader requested we run the program again. She offered financial support for a Master Gardener to become a coordinator within the School Plus program. Master Gardeners declined the offer, but were excited to offer the program as part of their volunteer time.

In 1995, 25 classes were taught to approximately 480 students by 8 Master Gardeners in 5 schools.

Several lesson plans were expanded and enriched by Master Gardeners, in 1995. For example, a “Mr. Seed Head” project was added to the seed unit, an innovative egg shell and grass project was created, and herbs were added to one unit so children could experience the aromas and learn of the uses.

Tours were added in 1995 to area vegetable gardens. These tours helped children see, touch, and smell a variety of plants in various stages of growth.

One of the sites involved in the project planted their own flower garden outside the School Plus building on their campus.

The Future:
Master Gardeners, the School Plus Project leader, site coordinators and children are planning on the program again next summer. The number children taught will depend on the number of additional Master Gardeners who are interested in the program.

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