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**MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN PARTNERS WITH SOUTH SIDE DAY NURSERY
TO OFFER TAILORED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING**
Schoolyard Gardening Program Funded by the Missouri Foundation for Health

(ST. LOUIS): The Missouri Botanical Garden has partnered with the South Side Day Nursery (SSDN) to establish a tailored schoolyard gardening program. The endeavor, made possible by funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health, includes the creation of an outdoor garden classroom at SSDN; weekly lessons in both the classroom and the garden; curriculum resources and teacher professional development; and the organization of ongoing family and community events. The collaborative project began this spring and will continue through the 2009-2010 school year.

“The Garden is continually requested to provide support for schoolyard gardening programs,” said Deborah Frank, vice president of sustainability. “This partnership has created a fantastic opportunity for us to pilot what we believe will be the most effective structure and strategies for projects of this nature.”

The program aims to foster the connection of children, teachers, staff and families to plants and nature. Participants will learn about local foods and backyard flora and fauna, and outdoor play is encouraged; the goal is to enhance understanding of nutrition and wellness.

A crucial component of the new partnership is the 1,000-square-foot children’s garden planted at SSDN, which demonstrates the potential of small garden spaces. Edible plants including watermelons, blueberries, strawberries, pumpkins, squash, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes and peas surround a central apple tree. Other plants selected for their ability to attract butterflies and other pollinators, to provide food for birds, or for their smell and texture include lavender, mountain mint,

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ADD ONE: Schoolyard Gardening

black-eyed susans, zinnias, snapdragon, sedum, love-in-a-puff and more.

Four SSDN pre-school classes of three- through five-year-olds enjoy weekly garden experiences, as well as weekly age-appropriate indoor classroom lessons developed by Garden Education Division staff. Lessons are designed to make learning fun and hands-on. Children play “name games” to discover what plants need to grow; identify seeds, sprouts and other plant parts by planting veggies to make a salad; make “how tall” or “how much” comparisons as they learn measurement skills in the garden; and more. Core lesson themes rotate each month, with new topics explored from week to week.

“It is great to see the kids get excited about going outside when we arrive each week,” said Jessica Kester, supervisor of youth and family programs in the Garden’s Education Division. “They are starting to notice changes in the garden from week to week, and have already learned basic plant and nature vocabulary terms, which we use in our classroom journals to record what we saw, did or learned together in the garden.”

Four professional development opportunities are offered for teachers throughout the year. Garden staff also provide a recommended reading list and activities for self-guided classroom experiences. The first of three family and community events was held in May, with others scheduled for August and October. Parents and neighbors are invited to see what is going on in the garden, participate in an educational activity with the children and enjoy lunch together.

“From this program, we hope to develop a garden classroom model that we can use at other schools,” said Kester. “Having gardens that the children can visit on a regular basis is a fantastic way to connect them to plants, seasons, healthy and fresh foods, and nature in general. By giving them a place that they feel responsible for that is beautiful and productive, we hope to instill a long-term sense of responsibility for caring for their schoolyard, then their neighborhood, and eventually the environment as a whole.”

SSDN, an early childhood education center in south St. Louis, was founded as South Side Day Nursery in 1886 by 15 Unitarian women to provide a safe, nurturing, educational environment for the children of working families. SSDN continues its mission today, serving more than 100 children from under-resourced families every year, ages six weeks to pre-kindergarten. SSDN is licensed by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, accredited by Missouri Accreditation of Programs for Children and Youth, is a partner with Grace Hill Head Start, and has been a proud member of the United Way of Greater St. Louis since the 1940s.

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ADD TWO: Schoolyard Gardening

Funding for this project was provided in part by the Missouri Foundation for Health. The Missouri Foundation for Health is a philanthropic organization whose vision is to improve the health of the people in the communities it serves.

The mission of the Missouri Botanical Garden is “to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment, in order to preserve and enrich life.” It is the oldest continually operating botanical garden in the nation, celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2009. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.

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NOTE: A digital color image is available by request. Download media materials at www.mobot.org/press.

The Missouri Botanical Garden’s mission is “to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment, in order to preserve and enrich life.” Today, 150 years after opening, the Missouri Botanical Garden is a National Historic Landmark and a center for science, conservation, education and horticultural display. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.