

Gardens for Children – Final Report of our Activities 2011 - 2019

Introduction

Since its beginning in 2011, our garden project promotes nutrition and creates an awareness of the origin of our food and biological coherences to the youngest members of our community. Project location is the area of East Hamburg as it is a social hotspot within our community. The garden project addresses social disadvantaged children aged 6 to 10 years at elementary schools of Hamburgs east. In general, in their families exists nearly no knowledge about healthy food.



Harvest of strawberries (2014)

In the garden project, the children are instructed by gardeners to look after a garden/a patch on the terrain of their school. They learn how to cultivate vegetables, salads and herbs, and the project links age-appropriate physical exercise with basic knowledge on healthy nutrition. Additionally, the children use the school's kitchens to prepare healthy meals of the vegetables from their gardens.

The children gain practical gardening skills suitable for daily use and get to know the vegetative diversity of vegs and fruits and how this becomes their daily food.

As a consequence, the children will get a new and healthy attitude towards food, nutrition and health in general as well as a lot of physical exercise - of all this they will profit during their whole future life.

Thanks to the generous donation of the General Mills Foundation the garden team of Billenetz was able to provide four gardens for children each year. In the years 2011 to 2019 eleven schools took part in our gardening project. In most of these schools we were active for four to five years, in some of them the gardening project was continued afterwards by teachers.

Children in their garden at Wichern School (2016)



Regretfully it is not possible for our gardener and her pedagogical assistants to continue the gardening project in 2020. Therefore, this report is about "Gardens for Children" in 2019 and gives a resume of our activities from 2011 until 2019 as well.

Each year from March to October we planted and cultivated patches of garden in three or four elementary schools for gardening groups of children, where these gardens were already in existence from our prior activities. At each school after the summer holidays the children and our garden team were busy with harvesting the plants and the preparation of meals in the kitchen, as well as with preparing the patches for the next season.

Additionally, with the assistance of the team of General Mills Hamburg, we created a new garden every year.



Team of General Mills Hamburg on Earth Day, creating the new garden at Wichern School (2016)

During the nine years of “Gardens for Children” we have worked with children in 36 gardening projects in eleven schools.

The teachers at the schools participated actively in our gardening project with the aim to learn to maintain the patches on their own. With this aim we were successful in some of the schools but regrettably, not in all of them. At least in Brüder Grimm School, Fuchsbergredder, Billbrookdeich, Hauskoppelstieg, Sterntalerstrasse and Wichern School, the gardening project continues.

Here are some impressions of our “Gardens for Children”:

2019: Gardens at School Sterntalerstrasse and Wichern School continue



Patches at Sterntalerstrasse ...



... and at Wichern School

In 2019, due to the smaller donation of General Mills, we could not create a new garden. Instead, we continued the gardening project at two schools of the previous year where the project was most successful, Sterntalerstrasse and Wichern School.

As in the previous years, the patches were cultivated by the children, teachers and social education workers of these schools and our gardening team. The involvement of teachers and social education workers at both schools was especially important because they had already promised to continue the garden project in 2020 without us. Therefore the transfer of our gardening know-how to them was very important – and in the end successful, as the involved teachers and social education workers were very dedicated and enjoyed the gardening. In the spring of 2020, both schools will continue the Gardens for Children on their own.

2018: New Garden at Billbrookdeich School



Herbs at Billbrookdeich School

In 2018 we started a new garden at Billbrookdeich, a regular primary school with a big unused enclosed garden.

The school planned to offer a gardening course once a week for pre-school-children. Our gardening class started late April with 15 students, who cultivated the patches with big enthusiasm. The patches were cultivated with vegetables, herbs and flowers.

The school decided to continue the garden on their own in 2019.

The gardens at Hauskoppel, Sterntalerstrasse and Wichern School continued.

2017: New garden at School Sterntalerstrasse

In 2017 the gardens at Rebus, Hauskoppel, Brüder Grimm and Wichern School continued. We started a new garden at Sterntalerstrasse School, a regular primary school with a big unused lawn.

The school planned to offer an open gardening course once a week for any student who is interested in spending their afternoon hours in that garden.



Patches at School Sterntalerstrasse



After the harvest: Healthy meal with salad

Only by the great assistance of the team of General Mills Hamburg this additional garden was possible. A new interesting activity can be offered to the children. The feedback of the children and teachers is more than positive. The children love their “garden hours”.

In the frame of the annual “Earth Day” in April, six patches were built with the assistance of ca. 15 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg. Their task was not only to install the new patches (most of the General Mills team were very familiar with our standard design of patches) but also to clear the ground for the new patches and to lay sidewalk panels around the patches in order to protect the lawn.

Our gardening class started late April with 15 students, who cultivated the patches with big enthusiasm. The patches were cultivated with vegetables, herbs and flowers. As in all of our schools, the children harvested the vegetables when they were ripe and learned to cook tasty and healthy meals.

2016: Wichern School

In 2016 the gardens at Rebus, Brüder Grimm, Hauskoppel and Schleemer Park continued. Additionally, we started a new garden at Wichern School, a regular primary school with a big garden in a garden plot settlement two minutes walk away from the school.

In the frame of the annual “Earth Day” in April, six patches were built with the assistance of ca. 15 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg. Their task was not only to install the new patches in a different design (most of the General Mills team were very familiar with our standard design of patches, this time it had to be a little different because of a lot of rabbits around) but also to clear the ground for the new patches.

Our gardening class started late April with only five students, but at the end of May up to 20 decided to spend their afternoon classes in our garden, who cultivated the patches with big enthusiasm. The patches were cultivated with vegetables, herbs and flowers.



Garden at Wichern School after some months

2015: Brüder Grimm School

2015 we started a new garden at Brüder Grimm School, a regular primary school with a huge unused area that was turned into a new garden with patches for three groups (60 children) of the age of 8 to 10 years. The gardens of the previous years at Hauskoppel, Schleemer Park, Rebus and Fuchsbergredder continued.

In the frame of the annual “Earth Day” in April, four huge patches and six regular ones (equivalent to 21 regular patches) should have been built with the assistance of ca. 15 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg.

Their task was not only to install the new patches but also to clear the ground for them. Unfortunately there were several huge concrete slabs under a thin layer of grass, so we could not

complete our task that day. It took two more afternoons to get rid of the concrete slabs and to install all patches.

During the three weeks before the patches were completed, we spent most time cooking vegetable meals with the children to decide what we will plant upon completion of our patches.

The ten patches have been cultivated with big enthusiasm by three classes with vegetables and herbs.

After three years the teachers of Brüder Grimm School were able to take over the gardening project to continue in their own responsibility.



Patches at Brüder Grimm School (Spring 2015)

2014: School Hauskoppelstieg

In early 2014, our school Weddestrasse moved into a new building as it was united with the school Hauskoppelstieg. The school Hauskoppelstieg is a „special school“, where slow learners and children with behavioral disorders are looked after. For these children all forms of practical instructions are a big enrichment, as most of them have severe problems with theoretical lessons.



New greenhouse at Hauskoppelstieg (Spring 2014)

As the head of school asked us to be not only part of their “afternoon support service” but also become a part of their regular morning classes twice a week, we have taken care of two groups in the morning since late march and still do till the middle of October.

Unfortunately the school Hauskoppelstieg had no patches for planting vegetables and herbs when we started. So we had to install several patches for vegetables and herbs at that school in the spring of 2014.

Additionally, we installed a small greenhouse with the aim to teach teachers as well as children how to start the process of seeding and planting the vegetables for the garden patches in their school. The greenhouse has the additional advantage that it provides the opportunity for the children to take care of the plants even during bad weather-periods (of which we regrettably have many in Hamburg).

During the first four weeks, before the patches and the greenhouse were completed, we spent most time cooking vegetable meals with the children to decide what we will plant upon completion of our patches.

As we were part of the regular classes we also spent some hours with theoretical lessons on gardening during the first four weeks.

Since early May we took care of the patches regularly twice a week.

The six patches have been cultivated with big enthusiasm by two classes (aged 8 to 12 years). The patches were cultivated with vegetables and herbs. After the summer holidays the children and our garden team were busy with arranging the new greenhouse for the season 2015 and with taking care of their patches, including harvesting the plants and the preparation of meals in the kitchen.

In 2014, the Gardens for Children were continued in the schools Schleemer Park, Rebus and Fuchsbergredder.

In summer: various salads in the patches at Hauskoppelstieg



2013: New garden and greenhouse at School Schleemer Park

The school Schleemer Park is a regular elementary school. The average class size is 20 students. During our regular period of the „Bille in Bewegung“ - project (2007 – 2009) there had been cultivated 14 patches, which were looked after once a week by two classes. During the following three years all these patches lay waste, as the responsible teacher retired in early 2010. All the teachers were absolutely enthusiastic about our offer to take care of their garden again.



New greenhouse at Schleemer Park: ideal for the first weeks of growing



In autumn: ripe tomatoes in greenhouse Rebus (2013)

In the frame of the annual “Earth Day” in April the 14 patches at Schleemer Park have been revived with the repeated assistance of ca.15 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg. Task was not only to clear the extremely feral garden area for the patches but also for our new greenhouse.

Originally, we had planned to build only one big greenhouse at Rebus. Unfortunately a big greenhouse would have to be fixated very deeply in the ground with unforeseen administrative barriers. So we had to change our plans and decided to build two smaller ones, one at Rebus and the other one at Schleemer Park.

As these administrative barriers took some precious time, we could not start establishing the greenhouses before Mid-June, only a short time before the start of the summer holidays. We finished the greenhouse at Rebus at the end of June and the one at Schleemer Park in late July, just in time for this years second gardening season.



Newly planted patches at Schleemer Park

Starting in April, we took care of the patches at Schleemer Park regularly once a week. Only by the great assistance of the team of General Mills Hamburg this additional garden was possible. A new interesting activity could be offered to the children.

The feedback of the children and teachers is more than positive. The children love their “garden hours”. Since the end of April the patches have been cultivated with big enthusiasm by two classes (aged 8 to 12 years). The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers.

In 2013 we continued the gardens at Rebus and Fuchsbergredder, whereas the gardens at Fritz Köhne School and Weddestrasse ended.

2012: Schools Fuchsbergredder and Steinbeker Marktstrasse

In 2012 we re-started the garden project at school Steinbeker Marktstrasse where we had a gardening project in previous years. Additionally, with the help of the General Mills team a new garden was created at school Fuchsbergredder. This school is a regular elementary full time school with several afternoon classes, attended by an average of 15 children.

There had been no garden group previously as two already existing small patches in a more or less dark internal courtyard would have been too insufficient for that many children. So the head of school was very enthusiastic about our offer to create four new patches in order to enable them to establish a new afternoon gardening class.



Patches at Fuchsbergredder after some months



Although that small internal courtyard had not much sunshine, the new garden had to be set up there, as the school had no other place to offer. In April 2012 the team of General Mills Hamburg created the new patches and revived the existing patches.

Afterwards the patches were cultivated and been taken care of with big enthusiasm by the “Environment Study Group” of 16 children (aged 8 to 12 years). The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers.

Harvest of radishes, Fuchsbergredder

At the end of the crop cycle the children spent many hours in the school kitchen to prepare meals with the vegetables and herbs harvested in their garden.

The other locations where we continued the gardens in 2012 were at Rebus, Weddestrasse and Fritz Köhne School.

Additionally, we re-started the gardening project at school Steinbeker Marktstrasse, where in the years 2007-2009 four patches had been established during our project “Bille in Bewegung”.

After the end of the regular project period in 2009 the patches at Steinbeker Marktstrasse were cultivated by several teachers and garden groups. However, only flowers were planted as no teacher at this time had the expert knowledge of vegetable gardening. The school appreciated our re-engagement in April 2012 very much.



Patches at Steinbeker Marktstrasse

Since early April 2012 we started to use the patches for vegetable again. The Steinbeker Marktstrasse “gardening day” was every Tuesday.

Unfortunately nearly all Tuesdays of that season were extremely bad weather days, starting with snow in April, and going on with heavy rainfalls during May and June.

So we had to spend more gardening days in the school kitchen, preparing meals with those vegetables we originally planned to cultivate in the four patches than being outside in the garden.

This experience with our “Hamburg weather” made us think of the use of a greenhouse during the coming garden seasons to become more independent of bad weather.

2011: New garden at Rebus Billstedt



Rebus Billstedt is an institution of the school authority in which students, absconding from normal school instruction or showing such extreme behavioural disorders that they can not be instructed in regular school classes, are taken care of. The aim of this institutional care is to reintegrate these children into regular schooling. In order to do so numerous project activities are offered. In this spirit our „Garden for Children“ is a true enrichment for the concept of Rebus.

In the frame of the „Earth Day“, 16 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg built a new garden with four patches at Rebus. So a new interesting activity could be offered to the Rebus children.



Patches with vegetables and flowers at Rebus, spring 2011

Harvest of zucchini, autumn 2011

Thanks to the donation of the General Mills Foundation we also re-started in 2011 the gardening projects at School Weddestrasse and Fritz Köhne School. In both schools we had Gardens for Children in the previous years 2007-2009 during our project “Bille in Movement” (“Bille in Bewegung”) and children and teachers at both schools were very happy about the re-start.



Garden at School Weddestrasse ...



... and at Fritz Köhne School

A typical day in the Garden for Children

Each unit starts with an address of welcome by the gardener and the pedagogical assistant and the introduction of today’s activities.

At the beginning the gardener explains in an age appropriate way the theoretical basics of the actual work, the development of the plants, etc. This theoretical introduction is best done directly in front of the patches, where everyone can see what is talked about.

Then joined practical work at the patch (to sow, to plant, to weed, to care, to water, to crop, etc.).

The children document the course by photos, drawings and short descriptions of the activities and work steps.



Planning session at Fritz Köhne School (2012)



The unit ends with a feedback (what was done, what was learned) and the planning of the next unit.

At the end of the season the children prepare the cropped vegetables, herbs, and berries (soup, herb butter, jam, etc.) and celebrate a common meal of the prepared ingredients, and/or the children take the recipes and products home.

Harvested pumpkins, Wichern School (2016)

Summary

Our gardening project was resoundingly successful. All participants – children, teachers, pedagogical assistants and gardener – enjoyed the weekly garden sessions and the results of our gardening project.

All participating children gained good knowledge about the growth phases and vegetative diversity of vegetables, herbs and fruits and how this becomes their daily food. This changes their attitude towards food, nutrition and health - hopefully for many years - and provides them with a lot of physical exercise.

We are told that the children were looking forward to their gardening hours during the entire week and that the gardening-experience is also helpful for the children to be more concentrated and perceptive during their regular classes.

All in all, we are very happy and content about nine years of “Gardens for Children”. A very big “Thank you” goes to the General Mills Foundation for their generous donation, and to the team of General Mills Hamburg for their voluntary work and commitment by building new garden patches during all those years.



Garden at Rebus Billstedt

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