

LEARNING BLOOMS

Teaching Garden provides outdoor college classroom

LIVING, 1C



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Living OUTSIDE



TODAY
High: 67
Low: 41

Mostly sunny



SATURDAY
High: 72
Low: 47

Sunny



SUNDAY
High: 65
Low: 41

Slight chance
of rain showers.
Partly cloudy

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St. Michael's College students taking an interdisciplinary course in children's literature and botany study Monday in the college's teaching garden in Colchester.

Photos by
**GLENN
RUSSELL,**
Free Press

BOOKS in Bloom

St. Michael's project combines botany, literature

By Sally Pollak
Free Press Staff Writer

THE GARDEN opens like the pages of a book. It invites you in not with words or phrases, but colors, shapes and texture.

There are lupines and zinnias, delphiniums and lilies, poppies and blueberries. For young readers and their parents, and older readers who remember the delights of children's literature, the garden is a kind of treasure trove of clues and characters from well-loved books.

Each planting in the Books in Bloom garden at St. Michael's College represents a botanical character in a children's book.

The lupine is from "Miss Rumphius," the poppies are

from "The Wizard of Oz," the blueberry plants from "Blueberries for Sal." The garden is a live and lush collaboration between two professors and their students, education professor Valerie Bang-Jensen and biology professor Mark Lubkowitz.

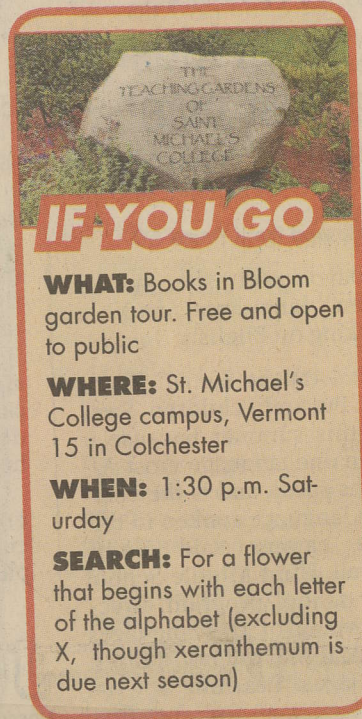
The professors devised the project for several reasons, from a desire to create "destination gardens" on campus to their understanding that students benefit from thinking about problems and concepts from a variety of perspectives. The garden is a "trans-disciplinary" learning project, they said.

"Are we preparing people to go out and solve complex problems if they've never had to approach a problem — or a topic — from a different focus?" Lubkowitz asked.

So students in his botany course and Bang Jensen's children's literature course are studying together to think about the gardens from a dual perspective: What botanical role or even biological concepts are conveyed by the plants in a certain book? Is there a certain scientific leeway taken in the name of narrative? And, from a literary view, what is the flower's role in the story; what is the significance of the seeds and flowers?

"We've only spent two classes together and I feel like all of us have already learned from each other," said Ashley Laurent, a sophomore. "The thing that I think is coolest about it is the garden is shaped like an open book, so you're immersed in it."

See **BOOKS, 2C**



IF YOU GO

WHAT: Books in Bloom garden tour. Free and open to public

WHERE: St. Michael's College campus, Vermont 15 in Colchester

WHEN: 1:30 p.m. Saturday

SEARCH: For a flower that begins with each letter of the alphabet (excluding X, though xeranthemum is due next season)

BOOKS: Project combines literature, botany

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Ashley said being at the garden and looking at the flowers helps her think about the books they refer to, some of which she read as a child. She was inspired to ask herself questions: "Why do I remember these books and what would a child remember about them?"

Anna Vanyush, a junior who is studying elementary education, said working with the botany students was useful in thinking about how she would teach.

"It's important for teachers to present picture books from a different point of view instead of just the plot," Anna said.

The students on Monday were planning garden tours of Books in Bloom, including a tour at 1:30 p.m. Saturday. The garden tour, for St. Michael's families and alumni, is open to the public.

Part of the garden project includes creating related material and activities geared to a range of interests. There is a "seedlings" program that suggests activities for elementary-school-age children; a "sapling" program for middle school students, and a "hobby naturalists" unit for people who know about plants, but want to learn more.

Young children are encouraged to use the garden for color hunts,

with activities such as searching for and drawing a blue flower, and pointing out what book the flower is in. There are also questions they can think about as they visit the garden: What does Eeyore eat in "Winnie the Pooh" and what kind of seeds does Miss Rumphius sow in the book named for her?

The answer is lupine, and spreading the seeds is her effort to make the world more beautiful. From a botanist's view, the flowers that Miss Rumphius is cultivating are "naturalized" — brought from another place and not displacing a native species, Lubkowitz said.

The Books in Bloom garden is

part of a larger outdoor educational effort on campus called the Teaching Gardens. It started in 2003 with St. Michael's College's Arboretum, an initiative that identified more than 50 kinds of trees on campus.

Monday, students talked about flower and garden references in the books, from noting word choice (wilted) to recognizing an overarching theme.

"A lot of the books start out sad and melancholy," one student noted, "and in the end they're in bloom and happy."

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