

# Babula Children's Garden

## Progress Report 2013 Season

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The 2013 summer season saw a steady stream of families visiting the Babula Children's Garden mostly on afternoons and weekends. The biggest attractions were the water features and the bouncing bridge. We could always tell when someone was having fun on the bridge even at the other end of the garden because of the stomping and creaking as kids bounced across the short bridges. We still need to add a wire safety barrier to the lower level of the bridge to make it safe for little children.

We conducted our sixth annual Dead End Poet's Society poetry contest for elementary school children during March and April. It was a great success, and we awarded cash, book and T-shirt prizes to teachers and their student winners. We also posted the winning poems in the maze for everyone to enjoy. This program is a fun way to get kids thinking about gardens long before the snow melts. However, it is only as good as the teachers who build poetry into their curriculum. Participation ebbs and flows each year, but we think it is worth continuing because it draws more parents and children to the Garden, some of whom have never heard of the GBG.

The 2013 season included one new construction project, a bicycle wheel rim dome that will be covered with vines such as scarlet runner beans to form a small fort for children. Katie DiCristina designed and built the dome, and we gratefully accepted donations for wheel rims from individuals and businesses including Great Land Sports, Goldstream Sports and Grant Matheke.

A surprise for all of us was Mud Day, a program spearheaded by local parents who were interested in providing an opportunity for kids to get muddy, splash around in water, and just enjoy the day. Lots of children and parents showed up, and the mud pit was a great success. We are currently communicating with the event organizers from 2013 about repeating this event in 2014. An ASRA (Alaska Summer Research Academy) instructor has already offered ASRA students to assist with construction of the mud pit.

Guided educational programs used the Babula Garden for programs in 2013. The ASRA program used the garden around the pioneer cabin as a workspace for the Math in Nature module. The gardens were landscaped using mathematical principles. Unfortunately, because of a miscommunication, the gardens they planted were not maintained, and we removed all of them before summer's end. We thought ASRA students would continue the weeding maintenance as they had in 2012, however, that was not the case. In 2014, and each new growing season in the future, we will establish a clear understanding for maintenance protocol of the ASRA project in the Garden.

The 4-H Cloverbud Camp, a UAF Cooperative Extension Service program, also used the Babula Garden as part of its experiential and educational program. We look forward to continued collaboration with educational groups and recognize that each year brings new awareness and improvements.

Student employees continued maintenance of landscaped areas including stabilizing rocks around the waterfall, fastening stones at the stream, planting rose bushes

and establishing sod along the flume, seeding and weeding sunflowers in the weather garden, replacing a peony plant at the entrance, planting squash and peas in the raised beds at the entrance as well as continuing efforts to establish the many *Caragana* (Siberian Pea) that we germinated for the hedge maze.

We designed signage for the maze, weather garden and volunteer-built projects in the Babula Garden. We were able to get many of the bronze plaques completed before the foundry in North Pole closed permanently. Any other plaques will have to be ordered from a foundry in Utah. We are finding welders to make stands for the signs, and installation of the signs will be completed during 2014. We are also in the process of manufacturing sign mounts for the bird tiles that will be installed in the Tree House. The tiles were generously donated by Nancy Hausle Johnson. Grant Matheke is routing the support boards, and they will be installed in 2014.

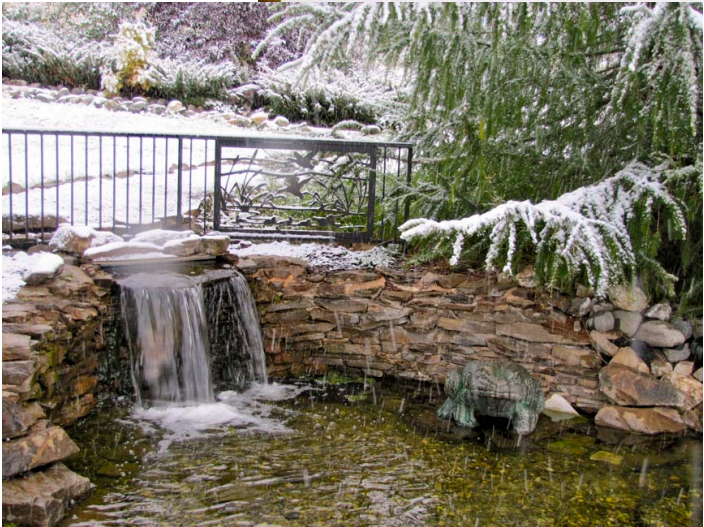
Our tentative plans for next season include:

- hire two (full time?) students
- prepare and install interpretative signage in the tree house, maze, interactive stream, weather garden, etc.,
- install weather vane at the peak of the tree-house roof and cable rail safety railing at the base of the clatter-bridges,
- continue to water and maintain the maze and count empty spaces for more Siberian pea. We will ask our volunteers to collect more seeds since our supply has been used up. We will install bronze plaques at the five entrances. Student employees will continue to trim the hedges to allow them to fill out,
- complete and install the bird plaques and identification labels,
- hold the Dead End Poets Society competition again this spring and install the winning poems in the maze, and
- Dr. Babula had mentioned purchasing additional sculptures for the garden. We will work with him to place them if he finds suitable sculptures.

Chancellor Rogers has generously donated funds so we can hire a temporary, 6 month replacement for Grant Matheke who will not be available for additional projects this summer. Approximately 25 percent of this person's time will be spent on children's garden activities. Grant plans to finish installation of the bird tiles and install the weather vane on the gazebo as a volunteer, but will not be available for additional work. The supervisor for all student employees will be Katie DiCristina. All daily work activities for student hires will be scheduled through her. Pat Holloway will continue to work on interpretive signs for the garden.



The Babula Children's Garden during the season's first snowfall





Recently repaired  
stream section covered  
with new sod.

Twenty 200-cell plug trays were seeded with Siberian Pea Shrub for planting in the Rose Maze. Germination was about 90%. Seedlings were planted throughout the summer as time and conditions allowed.

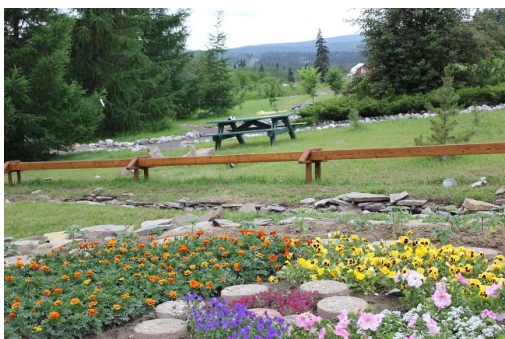


Mud day, held early in the summer, was a big hit with parents and children alike.



After the festivities the mud bath was drained and leveled and reseeded. If the parent group that helped with the planning and publicity is interested we will consider doing this again in the future.

The Alaska Summer Research Academy (ASRA) Middle School program also used the children's garden again in 2013. They planted the garden by the cabin as they have for the past several years. Unfortunately there was no communication from them that they would not be doing any maintenance and the garden became impossibly weedy. Next year we shall have to make provisions for garden maintenance if they are going to plant it again



The 4H summer day camp, Cloverbud Camp, and run by Marla Lowder, Cooperative Extension Service, again made extensive use of the children's garden during their tenure at GBG in July.

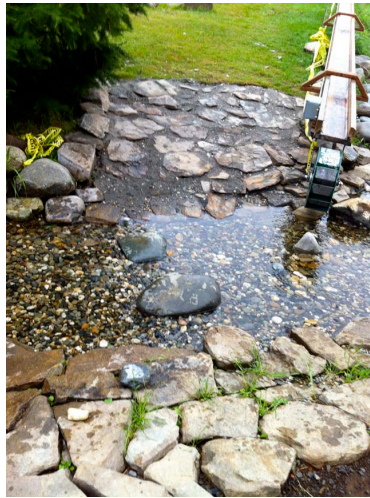
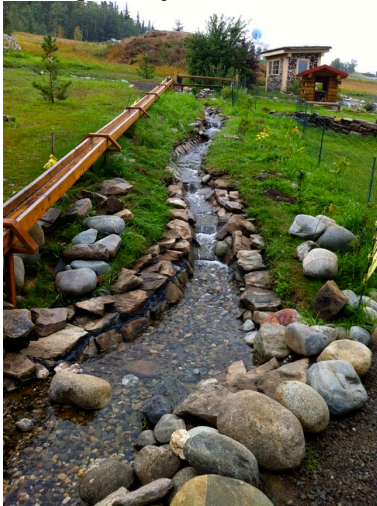




A geodesic dome made of recycled bike wheels was constructed in the children's garden to demonstrate innovative uses of materials that otherwise might end up in landfills. The dome can also act as a trellis for climbing ornamentals and vegetables making it an enticing 'cave' for children to explore.



We upgraded the upper portion of the interactive stream feature by fastening the stones in place with urethane foam and re-sodding. A number of rose bushes were planted in the area and a stone entryway and stepping-stones were added to the small pool by the water to limit child-initiated erosion.





Nine bronze plaques were cast and mounted on powder-coated stands ready for installation in the children's garden when the ground has thawed in the spring. The plaques will be placed at the entrances to the five petals in the rose maze, in the weather garden, the large retaining wall and steps and other volunteer constructed projects in the children's garden.



Bird identification signs are currently being fabricated out of two redwood 2x8s glued together. Ceramic tiles donated by local artist Nancy Haus Johnson will be routed flush into the redwood and cemented and grouted in place and metal etched labels with common name, family, genus, species and a brief note on the natural history of the species will be mounted below the tiles.



The bird ID. signs will be mounted using metal brackets with tamper-proof fasteners on the tree house railings.

Text for a sign to be mounted by the water wheel flow valve and meters has been developed (Appendix B.) and will be engraved this winter on the Versa-Laser engraver as soon the sign stock arrives.

## Appendix A. Mud Day Coverage

### **SNRAS Science & News**

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## **Sunday, June 9, 2013**

### **First Mud Day a blast**



Hundreds of children played in the mud pit at the Georgeson Botanical Garden June 9. Event organizer Andrea Chlupp hopes to make this an annual event.



The smile says it all.



Mud Day was a chance for children to explore nature in a freestyle manner!

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