

[From Fall 2004]

## Students Plant Native Garden for Visitors



Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in partnership with T.H. Badger Career Technical Education Center, located at Nandua High School, created a native plant garden adjacent to the Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center. The landscape management classes, instructed by Dr. Gail Lee, designed the garden, while I was given the responsibility to research and select the native plants.

The Chincoteague Natural History Association obtained a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to fund the project. Plants were selected to benefit the native wildlife, such as providing nectar and host plants for butterflies and berries for birds. As an educational tool, the garden exhibits how native plants thrive more naturally without the use of pesticides, constant watering, and maintenance. The native garden will also demonstrate how people can landscape their own homes with native plants.

The students designed and planted the garden, which was part of their final exam, and reinforced the principles taught in class. The students will have the opportunity to come back year after year to see their garden grow and flourish.

They were able to plant 609 plants and grasses in approximately 3 hours. It was noted how well prepared the students were and how they demonstrated their professionalism in working as a team on the project. Instructor Dr. Gail Lee stated that, "The goal of this joint project with the refuge was to offer students the opportunity to be part of the educational efforts of National Wildlife Refuge and to help inform the community on the native plants of Assateague Island." For some of the students, this was their first time visiting Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. They were excited to plant a garden at the refuge and to know that thousands of visitors would view their work.

Today, several of the students have summer horticultural jobs, and are putting to practice what they learned both in the classroom and in the field. Through planting a garden, the students not only experienced nature but created a masterpiece of their own to appreciate. The class expressed appreciation to the refuge staff for including them in making a contribution to the refuge's landscape, and being given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge by working on a meaningful project.

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