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Largest Youth Gardening Initiative in U.S. History Announces $5K Award Program

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BOSTON, MA, July 2011 ? Green Education Foundation (GEF) and Gardener?s Supply have teamed up to promote sustainability in the garden. GEF, a sustainability education nonprofit, and Gardener?s Supply, a company that serves millions of gardeners with supplies and resources, are calling on schools and youth groups nationwide to submit chronicles of their garden projects in a race to win a $5,000 prize. The award is designed to support the continued sustainability of an exceptional youth garden program that has demonstrated success, and has impacted the lives of kids and their community. The generous $5000 donation to the contest winner from Gardener?s Supply is a central component of GEF?s Green Thumb Challenge youth gardening initiative, a program that has already engaged over 750,000 children since its inception last year. The Green Thumb Challenge program aims to connect children to nature by guiding participants through the process of starting, maintaining and sustaining a youth garden of any size. The Green Thumb Challenge?s comprehensive website offers a multitude of fun, standards-based lessons and activities that link the garden to the classroom. Last year?s Green Thumb Challenge grant winner was Closer to Earth from Oklahoma City, OK. Closer to Earth intercepts at- risk youth before becoming involved in gang related activity, crime or the criminal justice system. These youth learn valuable life skills through organic vegetable production while immersing themselves in the emergency and market food distribution systems. The program donates some of its harvest to a shelter for people with HIV/AIDS, and also sells some of the fresh produce at local farmers markets. Closer to Earth garden coordinator, Rachel Kastner says, ?Gardening with our specific demographic of youth is about more than just educating them in gardening, health and the environment. It?s about empowering them to face the challenges they face so young in their lives, and gardening naturally does this. The Green Education Foundation (GEF) and Gardener?s Supply grant donation is crucial support for our program?s expansion, so that we can reach more inner-city youth.? The Green Thumb Challenge is not only an effective way to encourage youth gardening, but also a means of fostering physical and emotional health and well-being. Current statistics reflect alarming trends in the health of American children. One in three kids are overweight or obese, and incidents of related health issues such as high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes are soaring. ?When children are able to grow and taste their own vegetables, they are more likely to get excited about cooking and eating healthier foods,? noted Victoria Waters, GEF president. ?The Green Thumb Challenge grant program empowers children to cultivate their own food, and have fun doing it.? To be eligible to win the 2011 Green Thumb Challenge grant, please submit any of the following or a combination to service@greeneducationfoundation.org [1]: - an overview describing your garden project, - one video up to ten minutes long, - a digital portfolio with captions, or scanned artwork with descriptions. Submissions can also be sent by mail to: Green Education Foundation (GEF) 153 Washington Street, 4th Floor East Walpole, MA 02032

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