

# The Gardening Librarian



Once upon a time, a fifth grade student walked into Sue Dauberman’s library at Frank Allis Elementary and started counting. “Miss Sue,” she said, “you have over fifty plants in this library. Can I have one?”

“I had so many plants in that library,” Sue said, remembering. “It was a standing joke: I either had a greenhouse with books in it, or a library with too many plants.” She laughed.

“But people felt good in there. The plants, they give off water, oxygen, beauty...even the teachers would notice it, that the plants had a calming effect on their students.”

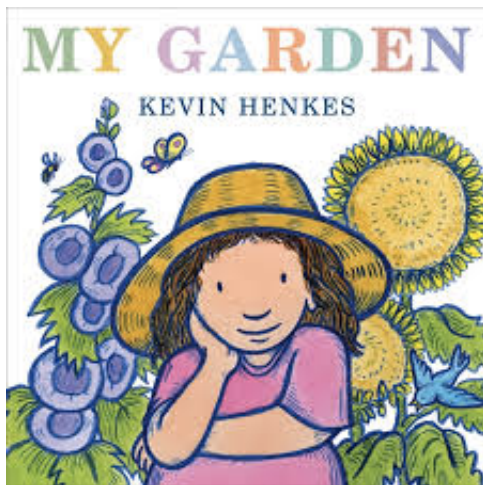
After thirty-two years as a school librarian, Sue retired to focus on the passion that was always entwined within her world of books: gardening. Nearly every day, from April through November, Sue is busy planting, harvesting, and watering her community garden plot by hand. Each summer, she brings zucchini cookies for the kids who visit the garden.

Sue knows that gardening and reading go hand in hand. As a little girl, she would follow her grandmother into the flower garden; by the first grade, she stood out as the only student who could name each flower she encountered. Those names translated easily to words on pages.

“Get them into it early, as preschoolers even,” she said. “Smelling, touching, all the senses – the more you’ve experienced something, the more you’re able to read about it.”

While at Allis, Sue helped students gain experience with plants: she made compostable newspaper pots with fifth graders, read aloud from garden-themed books, and filled teachers’ windows with her geraniums in winter. The school garden at Allis was just getting started as Sue was retiring.

“You know, I wish I was in school now,” she said, “because they’re doing so much more with gardening, the philosophies have really changed.”



*Sue’s favorite gardening book*

*This story was produced by the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative, a program of Community GroundWorks. For more information, visit [www.wischoolgardens.org](http://www.wischoolgardens.org).*



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Sue experienced the philosophy behind garden-based education long before it became well known among schools. While growing up on a farm in the early 1950's, she started reading Organic Gardening Magazine, and she was hooked.

“My parents hated gardening, actually, but from the magazine – it just all made sense to me. I read about composting, and I started a compost pile. I had a huge garden on our property from the time I was ten years old.”

For Sue, those early experiences led to a lifetime of plants and books – passions she passed on to her students. And, it seems, they stuck. The fifth grade girl who counted the plants in the Allis library came back to visit as a college student. She still had the plant that Sue had given her almost a decade earlier.

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