

Spring is in the air and so are the ladybugs! On May 15th the children of the Trinity Playgroup took a field trip to the Schuylkill River Park Community Garden for a ladybug release party. The Garden is administrated by the CCRA and houses 72 plots tended by community members. My friend Louise Wulfson and I share a plot with our sons David and Max who attend Trinity's post-day program which is comprised of fifteen children aged two to five. The Trinity teachers have been doing planting projects and taking flower walks with the kids around the neighborhood, so we were eager to introduce them the Garden.

The party started at Trinity Playgroup located at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Spruce with songs, stories and special ladybug snacks. Then the kids and their teachers, Miss Christa, Kristy and Danielle headed down Spruce to the Garden. After passing through the lovely garden gates and pointing out the sculpted turtles, birds and flowers, the first activity was to learn the garden rules. Stay on the gravel paths, don't walk in the flower beds, look but don't touch or eat the flowers unless a teacher says it's ok. The kids did a great job following the rules. As we walked through the garden, the kids could already identify lots of plants – tomatoes, roses, basil, even foxglove.

Releasing ladybugs is a natural form of pest control since they live on a diet of aphids. Plus it's a lot of fun. You get them in small plastic container and keep them refrigerated so they stay dormant. The directions on the container say the garden should be wet, so we rounded up lots of little watering cans and the kids took turns watering our plot. When we opened the container both the ladybugs and the kids were a little tentative. The ladybugs started to crawl up my arms and the kids got brave enough to take a few and gently put them on the garden plants. After a few minutes, the kids were scooping up handfuls of crawling bugs to set them free.

Once all the ladybugs had been released, we went on a tour of the garden. Garden chair Derek Freres had invited the kids to taste the herbs in the gardeners' communal plot and the mint garden. Some were brave enough to taste the rosemary and sage, and the Wrigley's spearmint was a big hit.

When the teachers asked the kids what they liked about the ladybug release, Katie K. said "I liked the ladybugs crawling on me and it tickled." "I liked watering the plants," said Dara J-C. Asked why we let the bugs free in the garden David B. said "Because they eat little bugs that eat flowers, and they need to fly too." All in all, the event was a big success. The Trinity teachers plan to continue to visit the garden this summer to take advantage of this valuable community resource.

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