

## Smart by Nature: School garden teachers gather in Waimea | Hawaii247.com



(Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)

Karin Stanton | Hawaii 24/7 Contributing Editor

Dozens of school garden teachers are gathering this weekend on the Big Island for the 3rd annual Hawaii School Garden Teacher Conference.

The conference at Waimea Middle School's Malaai Culinary Garden runs through Sunday, July 18 and features guest speakers from Center for Ecoliteracy, a Berkeley, Calif.-based company focused on the education for sustainable living.

Center executive director Zenobia Barlow and creative director Karen Brown were on hand Friday, July 16 to present "Smart by Nature: Growing School Garden Curriculum K-12."

Nancy Redfeather, Hawaii Island School Garden Network coordinator, said the conference highlights the enthusiasm Hawaii teachers have for gardening programs on campus.

"It's really all coming together," she said. "Conferences like this help us move forward. Right here today, we building and sharing curriculums."

Redfeather said she was pleased to learn every island now has a school garden coordinator, which will help develop more campus gardens.

"These kinds of programs will prepare our young students for a future that will require their knowledge, understanding and practice of whole systems thinking, and working creatively with project/place based learning in the real world," Redfeather said.

Barlow said the conference helps support and be responsive to grassroots efforts, although Hawaii has taken the first steps in creating the network and bringing the teachers together.

"There is this awakening but you need to instill the values. You already have those. It's not like you have to import them," she said. "The traditions can be reclaimed quite easily."

Still, she said, students would most benefit by a real commitment from the whole community. That might be easier to do with a state-wide public education system, rather than having to work with multiple districts.

"Hawaii has a huge asset in that it has community awareness," Barlow said. "Hawaii traditions and culture are quite remarkable. There is an economic grounding here already."

Barlow said she is hoping to secure federal funding to nurture and develop Hawaii's school garden program, and

promote it as a model for other communities and school districts.

During the conference, 65 school garden teachers and coordinators are working on developing a curriculum to address the underlying problems of obesity with nutrition (food), environment, culture, and health programs for keiki and youth.

By giving students knowledge, you are empowering them right from the start, Barlow said.

Among the benefits to students and the community:

- \* Students learn gardening and farming skills, which can bring down unemployment rates
- \* Students learn good nutrition and diet habits, which can combat obesity rates and health costs
- \* Students gain a better understanding of recycling benefits and how to handle solid waste
- \* Students are invested in the land and environment, which leads to better stewardship

It's almost a social upgrade," said Brown, although it's also in some respects a return to traditional Hawaii practices.

"One of the fundamentals to sustainability is feeding ourselves," she said. "Even with something like 90 percent of the food being imported and 90 percent of the fuel is fossil fuels, Hawaii is not that different from every other community on the mainland."

Brown said she was pleased with the good humor and warmth of the teachers she met at the Waimea conference.

"It takes patience and character to coax food out of the ground," she said. "There is a commitment to that here. And this networking is invaluable."

The conference focuses on a school garden curriculum that creates living laboratory/outdoor classrooms that weave science, language arts, mathematics, health, and physical education into meaningful activities giving students the practice of whole systems thinking and working creatively with project/place-based learning in the real world.

The Center for Ecoliteracy is a leader in the green schooling movement, known for its pioneering work with school gardens, school lunches, and integrating ecological principles and sustainability into school curricula.

Smart by Nature, the center's framework and services for schooling for sustainability, is based on two decades of work with schools and organizations in more than 400 communities across the United States and numerous other countries.

The conference, offered in collaboration with the community-based nonprofit Kohala Center, will focus on building a statewide foundation for ecoliteracy education, using as resources the Center's books Smart by Nature: Schooling for Sustainability and Big Ideas: Linking Food, Culture, Health, and the Environment.

Presentations will be filmed and will be available on the Hawaii Island School Garden Network website beginning in September.

Find out more:

[www.ecoliteracy.org](http://www.ecoliteracy.org)

[www.kohalacenter.org/HISGN/about.html](http://www.kohalacenter.org/HISGN/about.html)

Center for Ecoliteracy executive director Zenobia Barlow (center, in green) gives instructions to the 65 conference participants before they break into discussion groups. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)



