

# Biophilia Community Garden - an opportunity to bring children back to nature

Eva Scherer

Welcome

It's my big privilege to be the first speaker today.

What is Biophilia all about?

It is a passionate love of life and of all that is alive. Biophilia is already built into cellular structures, into genes, and into spirits of all living species including humans. Despite the way the world is presented to us by media today -knowing about it gives us back our power.

Our task is to recognise Biophilia. To respect it, honour it and protect it in each and every child we care for

Historically, some tribes and cultures were bio phobic.

Tribes who were uncaring, neglectful and not loving of nature, passed into oblivion through starvation and disease.



Prof. Jared Diamond specialises in this topic and explains clearly **why** societies collapse - the short answer is- Those societies that collapse do so because of **Negative Human impact on the environment**

There is well known example of Easter Island where denuding the island of trees created a situation where birdlife vanished, and slow starvation set in.

And now at present?

We are witnessing the collapse of the Solomon, Kiribati and other pacific islands; mainly due to over population and deforestation contributing to climate change and raising ocean levels.

Although aware of the danger we are unable to avoid this collapse.

Our problems can be compared to bacteria's colony in the petri dish. After reaching the peak power within 2 generations, the concentration of waste products of metabolism becomes too big and lack of food leads to collapse of the colony.



### **I remember**

when I was 10 years old I had my first moment of doubt about our future on this planet. I asked my biology teacher about us, people. She replied; “No worries- the earth is very big and people are not bacteria- they are thinking creatures.”

I believed in my teacher – 50 years ago in communist Poland 70 % of the population were farmers. We were living in a country where we were never hungry and never wasted food. Wasting was treated as a sin. Even today I can't help but feel emotional when I see bread in a rubbish bin.

Also, the average family had 2, maximum 3 children – families with more children were negatively perceived as if was something wrong with them.

There was no financial government support to raise children. This meant parents were fully responsible to make sure children were well fed and well educated.

My next moment of doubt came when, as a primary school student; I found **out** about the extinction of the European bison in our polish forests 500 years ago.

No, it's not possible! People simply hunted them and ate them? Primitively ate them? Couldn't they eat mushrooms instead!?

At this point I started to doubt human intelligence, but summer holidays came and my fears faded away.



Two months of freedom with nature in the country side. Paradise. As kids on holiday we used to play a special “courage game.” Running through stinging nettle bushes. The winner was a child with the most red spots on their legs. Imagine the screaming when we played this game! Why such a strange game? We children often helped our grandparents to collect fresh nettles in the forest. Bunches of nettles were used by seniors to beat their arms, hips and legs to cure arthritis. Now I look back and see our nettle runs as an arthritis preventative exercise. Actually in my case quite effective.

I also learned from my grandmother to have always a knife when going in to the forest. No, not to defend myself from an attack, but to use when collecting mushrooms. She taught me not to damage the mycelium. Always cutting the trunk carefully above the soil.

Remembering my childhood from the distance of both time and location I realised I grew up surrounded by **Regenerative Agriculture**

Now **Regenerative Agriculture** is a remedy promoted as a solution to climate change especially with regard to carbon dioxide emission, but 50 years ago we called it primitive and disadvantaged.



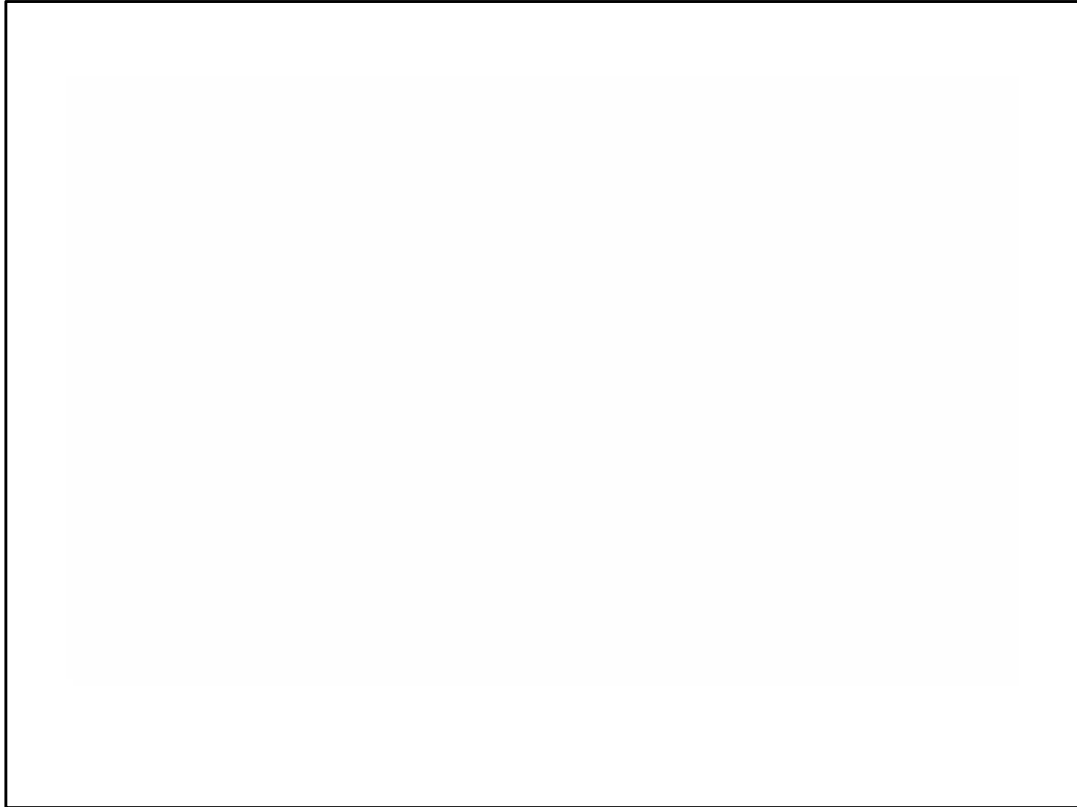
In those days communistic government pushed the use of mineral fertilisers through subsidies, but in Poland our farmers who had held their farms for centuries, from generation to generation were very attached to the traditional way of fertilising the land using dung.

They believed that the soil is part of our human soul. What comes from the soil should go back to the soil. We must put only natural elements, natural ingredients back into the soil. Not polluting our Mother Earth with any manufactured ones.

I remember from my childhood hills of pink or red granules – when I wanted to play with it like with sand my grandfather prohibited me. “Don’t play with this – its poison.” he said. Later during my Agriculture study I learned that these pink hills were potash fertilisers never used by my grandfather and other farmers in neighbourhood.

Today Regenerative Agriculture is taken seriously all over the world. Here is a short educational video I use to demonstrate to children in my Herb Fairies classes before creating a Carbon Catching Plot. I will tell you more about it later.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY9YVwJZDvw> 1,35 sec



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=AY9YVwJZDvw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=AY9YVwJZDvw)

Simple.

Isn't it?

Plus herbs with dense root systems and **an** often perennial way of growing contribute enormously with this process as an important part of **Regenerative** Agriculture.



## Why the society collapse?

- “It is conflict of interests – short term gain of decision making elite - against long term interests for society - especially when the elite are able to insulate themselves from the consequences of their own decisions”.

Prof .J. Diamond

Coming back to the question **why the societies collapse** Prof. Diamond states:

*I read from the slide.*

With such an attitude our petri dish is getting full very fast.



It is not surprising that a depressed young generation, aware of the current situation often escapes into drugs, antidepressants, suicide and recently into – virtual reality.

I would like to quote here the Christchurch scientist and labour party politician ..... Bronwyn Hayward . “Children growing up without access to wild or risky play are at risk of a **nature deficit disorder** they are deprived of access to the outdoors, effectively living as “pampered prisoners “under the anxious surveillance of helicopter parents who hover in the background anxious to ensure their children’s leisure time is used productively to develop skills they will need to succeed in a competitive global marketplace. It is really a frightening concept and it expands in front of our eyes very quickly



We are the children growing  
You are the place we live  
We are the seed you're sowing  
We are the life you give

We are the future rising  
We will be your voice  
We will watch and learn from you  
We will make the choice

• **Glyn Lechmann** music & lyrics

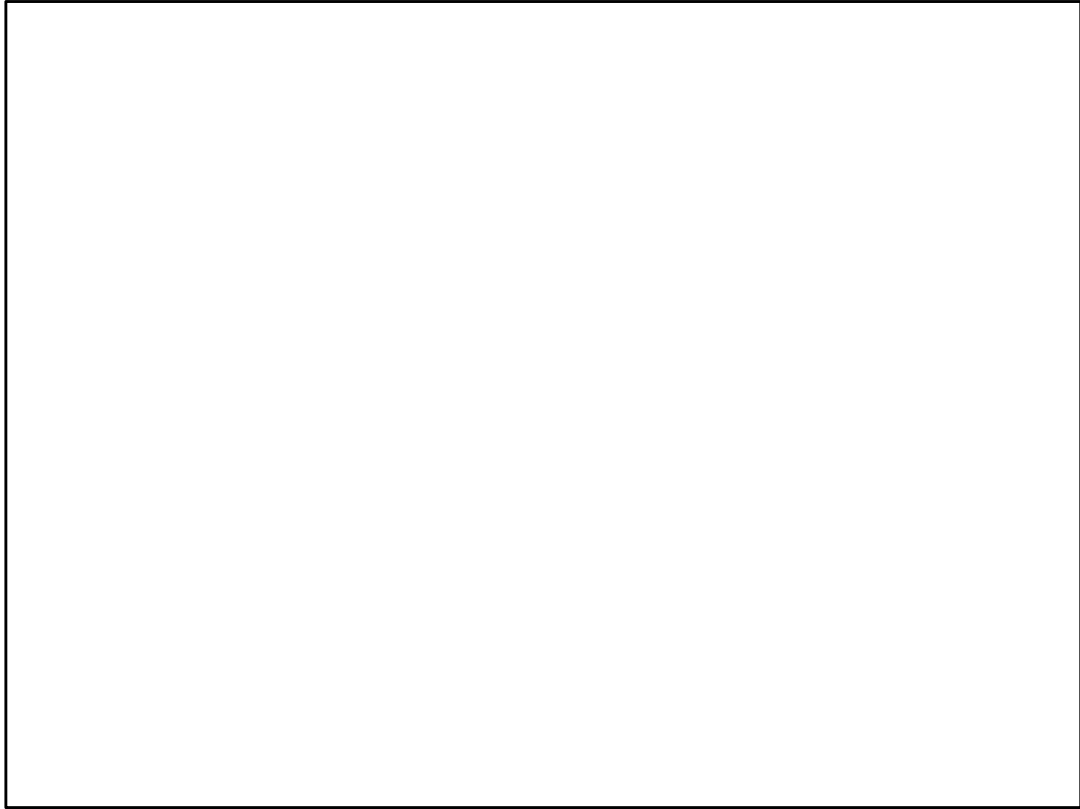
*I read it*



When I heard this song sung by children I thought there is enough of us, enough teachers, artists, environmentalists with big heart and strong minds. It's up to us which toys we will give our children to play with.



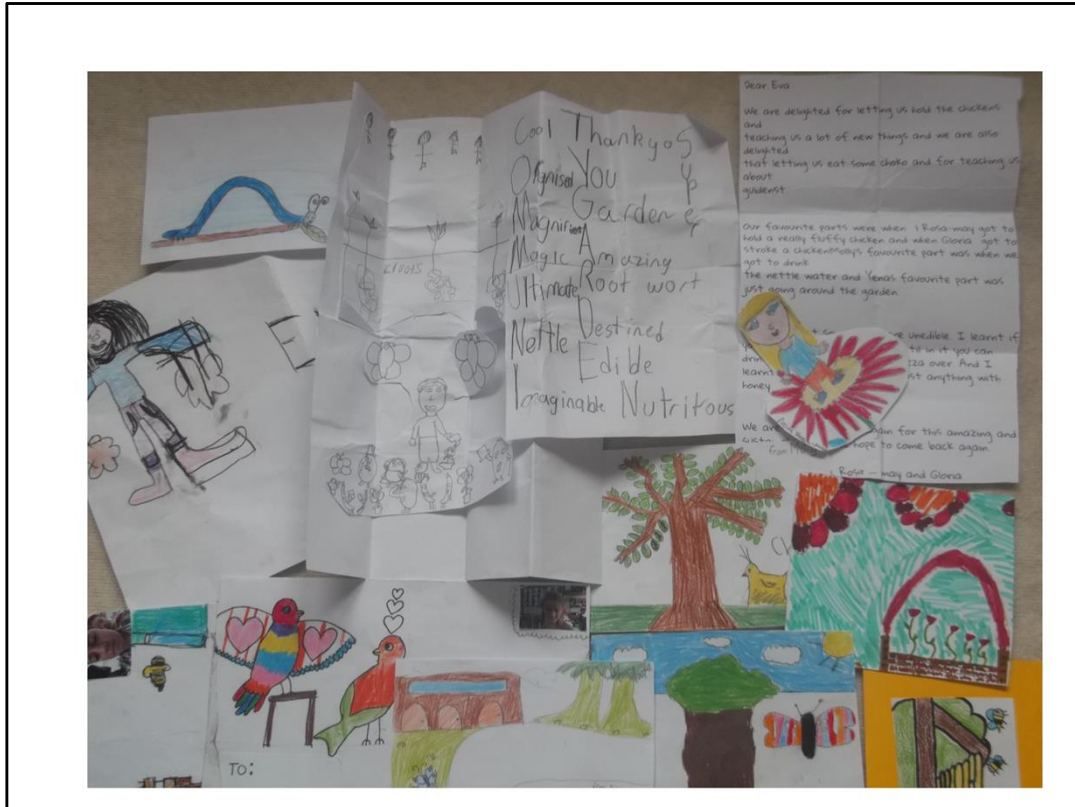
A few years ago I found a little paradise. Not a manicured one, not only to watch and admire, - but to feel close to, feel part of and to interact with. A safe place without use of chemicals – Ngataringa Community Garden in Devonport in Auckland, After being involved here for few years, I felt the need to expand the concept, so I designed and became the guide for the Medicinal Weeds Tour which was a great success during North Shore Eco Festival. Then an invitation came from Bayswater primary school and so began the adventure of teaching children about nature.



During one week 136 students divided into 7 groups visited Ngataranga Garden for 2 hours each.

The number of letters I received later - was overwhelming

Children from younger groups sent lots of pictures and teachers helped them with description; . Just some of them;



Dear Eva thank you for giving up your time in garden. We didn't know that when nettle stings you it is good for you, even it hurts, Echinatura is a plant that heals cold and aloe vera heals cuts, The sucks with stevia in them was really yum, we learned that the Tui cream we used for the hand massage is simply made **out** beeswax and oil ; "Our favourite parts were when I-Rosa may, got to hold really fluffy chicken and when Gloria got to stroke a chicken! . Molly's favourite part was when we got to drink the nettle water and Yenas favourite part was just going around the garden. I learned that some herbs are unedible . I learned that you can make almost anything with honey.

Signed;  
Rosa-may, Molly, Gloria, Jenas

## Junior Assistants plot

[www.nog-garden.com](http://www.nog-garden.com)



With such an enthusiasm and engagement the next step came naturally – small plots for the most devoted gardeners. The idea for Junior Assistants emerged.

All this is documented on my blog so: [www.nog-garden.com](http://www.nog-garden.com)

Hello, what's happening?





Our first planting .Jasper expects a lot of healthy carrots.



## The first Crop

from the left: Jamie, Jasper, Declan, Jasper M.



## Establishing a worm farm.





Jasper with his carrots, and plenty of courgettes

While the Junior Assistants were taking it easy on holiday, Nature kept on doing her part. This project finished naturally after 6 months.

Why?

Because children changed their school, additionally parents of 2 students got divorced and moved a long distance from the Garden.

Just life, but I hope the lessons they learned will stay with them.

The experience with Junior Assistants were a good preparation for my next project - Herb Fairies Academy


Spending time together, as a group, surrounded by nature creates a bond, awakens imagination and creativity -

Lots of drawings, listening to the stories, eating and dancing together is involved here.

Today I will present you just a quick kaleidoscope from activities I play with children during a session

## Back Massage routine

[www.childconnection.org.nz](http://www.childconnection.org.nz)

- • gentle stroking,
- • kneading just like making some bread ,
- • skiing each side of the spine
- swap 
- • scratch, scratch like a little Siamese cat
- • play the spine like a gigantic piano
- • gentle stroking

First tasks when children come to Ngataranga Garden is a short back massage using one of techniques from my Children Massaging Children (CMC) programme–A few easy strokes to relax and integrate the group

Please can I have one volunteer so I can demonstrate the strokes?

- gentle stroking,
- kneading just like making some bread,
- skiing each side of the spine
  
- scratch, scratch like a little Siamese cat
- play the spine like a gigantic piano
- gentle stroking

THANK YOU – You’ve been doing very well

## Herb Fairies Academy



Herb Fairies Academy is based on the John Gallagher Herb Fairies program which focuses on 13 different Herbs with Chickweed, Viola, Plantain, Melissa, Chamomile, Calendula, Dandelion, and Rosa to name only main ones. Each Fairie has its own song, story, recipe and activities for the children to be involved with for learning.





Today we will be introduced to the Plantain Fairy

For better remembering we play a “stinging bee” game .What does it looks like? One child pretends to be a bee and holding a marker tries to touch each child to sting them. Later children are chewing a plantain leaf and making poultice compress to put on the marked spot.

with chewing of the plantain leaf there was a lot of hesitation in the beginning but after listening to the story and song all went smoothly.

Here is the song we use before the activity – Please welcome the Plantain Fairie  
Please listen to this song :.....

· 1.5 minutes

When I was on holiday in Greece with my children years, years ago we were playing this game with children in the holiday park – all the children loved it showing later green spots from plantain compress to parents .It helped to develop friendship between the campers. Marcus, the father of one of the children mentioned that they used to make spit poultices when he was a child, later forgot about it as it was perceived to be not hygienic – now he was absolutely thrilled with his memory and herb wisdom recalled .

I am sorry I was rushing this morning and I forgot the plantain leaves for you to all make your own spit poultices. I will do better next time.



Another topic;



Children paint with real flowers ; (I explain showing petals of Mexican marigold , nasturtium , and live of kawakawa)

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One big topic I spend lot of time with, is dirt, soil and compost.

**I ask children - What is it?** (I show the audience a lump of clay)

Is this clay good food for plants?

Probably not – it's too hard, but if only it gets some water and air it becomes tasty food for plants.

Clay contains lots of minerals. Magnesium, Calcium Iron, We often buy these minerals as supplements in the pharmacy, don't we?

Can human eat clay than ?

Children are shocked. - Consternation

No.

Then I show a package of bentonite and ask one student to read the label.

Calcium Bentonite -100% **Pure Natural Unbleached Clay**...500 g. price \$8.50

Recommended serving ;1 teaspoon up to 5 times daily

Than I stir small spoon of powder in water ,and try it myself first , children usually follow me.

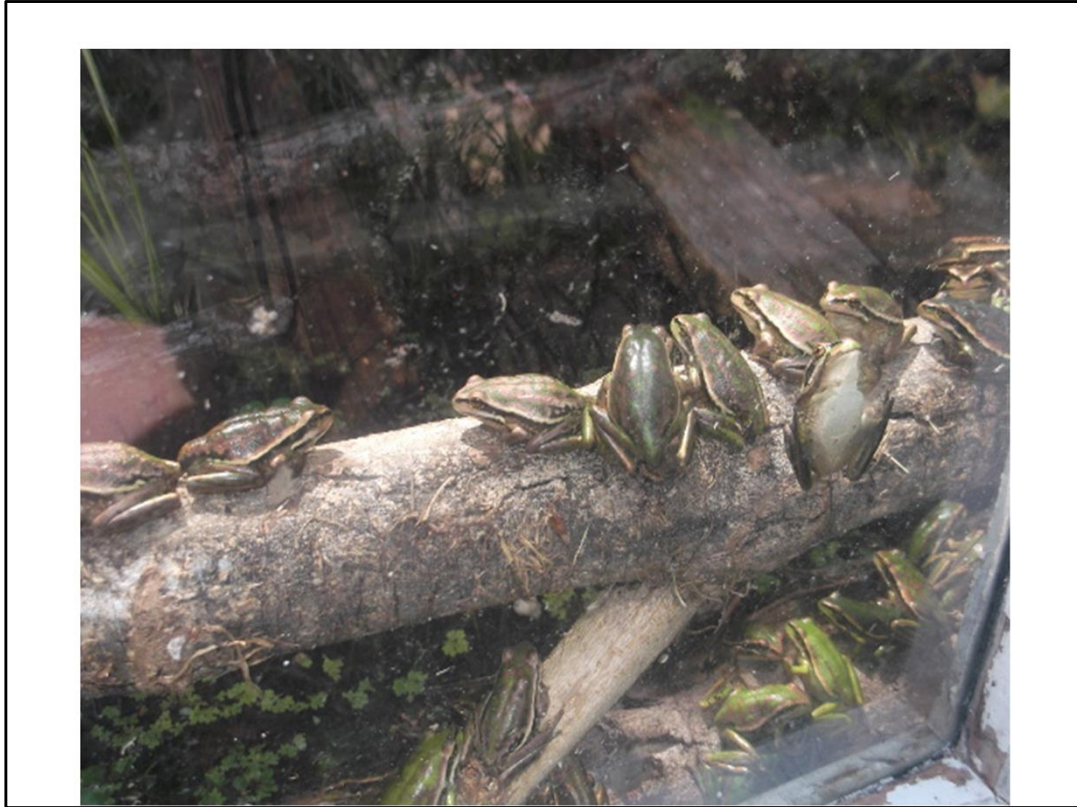
Not so bad!



After watching the film you have seen , the children are ready to choose the best CO2 catcher plant. Main condition was; dense root system and wide ground cover foliage. Our Carbon Catcher Hero become YARROW . Additionally it is perennial, tastes delicious in banana smoothie and is very healthy.

When students are already familiar with the garden I ask them to go around and choose a flower or a plant they love, one they feel a special attraction to. How is the plant making you feel? As an example - For me watching “Forget me not “makes me feel joyous. Cute small blue flowers remind me of my country holidays.

6 years old Morag brought with her a flower she didn’t know the name of. It was Flax. She explained that the flower reminds her of Cindy best friend from school, because it is as skinny as Cindy and flowers are blue like her eyes. Boys often choose plantain – as they like to play the flower heads as a plants guns, sometimes they choose Rosemary – especially when I mentioned it is good for memory or Borage –the plant that gave courage to Roman soldiers.



Sometimes there is drama in the garden- the food for caterpillars is missing , or there is a wounded caterpillar and again magnifying glasses are in action and stories by children continue..

There is a big variety of natural resources in every Community Garden ; herbs, bees, butterflies, birds, not forgetting worms and other bugs creating composts. In Devonport we have also quails, chicken, fish and frogs,





There is already a new project at Ngataranga Community Garden. “The Science Pavilion”. We are planning it in cooperation with the next door Recycle Centre. A 10 square meter shed from recycled wood pallets with solar energy, a system of catching rain water; and a composting toilet.

It will be a Mini sustainable eco living and operating case study easy to be duplicated within other community gardens **in New Zealand**

We will practice inside this science kingdom all sorts of experiments including production of feverfew capsules for mum’s migraine problems

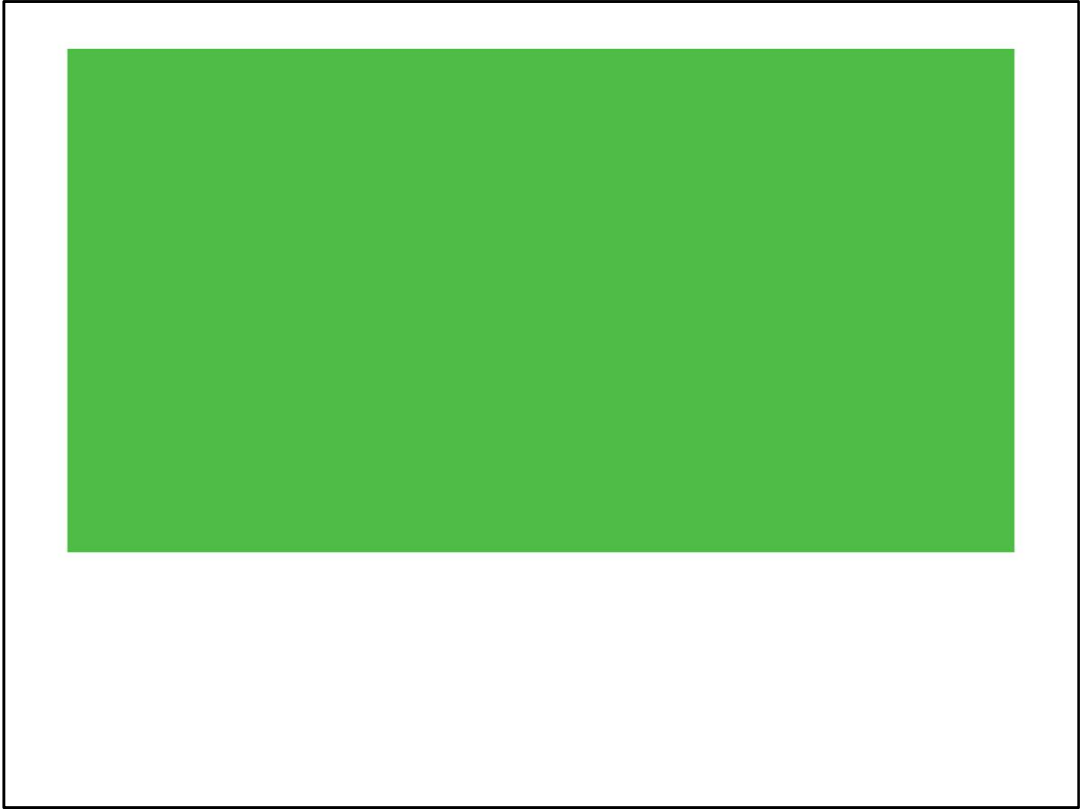
**I believe children are naturally biophilic when born – we just need to lead them gently and guide them gently through the open doors of their minds and hearts .**

**Are we ready to present them with the right toys?**

Listening to the song 1 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNtmqStVRo0&list=RDA1IU29SHA9E&index=4>

Lyrics and Music by Glyn Lechmann



Thank you

