

## Northeast students study ecology

*Written by Staff report*

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This spring, a new pilot program at Northeast Elementary School took a novel approach in teaching first-graders about plant ecology with the help of community partners.

After the students in Paula Kilts' class read a book about the life cycle of butterflies, Ithaca Children's Garden Education Coordinator Leigh MacDonald-Rizzo helped the students plant seeds for butterfly-host plants such as salvia, dill and butterfly bushes. The first-graders have also spent time dissecting and labeling flowers and playing games that demonstrated the concept of host plants.

Local storyteller Regi Carpenter held a story-telling session to introduce the students to plant mythology from a multicultural perspective. Then Carpenter used modeling techniques to coach the students into sharing their own stories about flowers, which helped them improve their language and public speaking skills.

Now that the students have cultivated new knowledge of seeds and stories they will attend an evening with their families in which they will give presentations and lead activity stations to demonstrate all they have learned about flower anatomy, host plants and gardening.

The pilot program, which offers feedback for a curriculum model that can be used for elementary classes through the district, was funded by a teacher grant from Ithaca Public Education Initiative. The grants seek to foster collaborations between community members and Ithaca educators.