

# Children still learn from the earth at Hilltop Garden

In the years afterward some have remembered that when the wind blew across the hill it was alive with waving purple alfalfa flowers.

But that special place on the northeastern edge of the Indiana University campus was destined to undergo a dramatic transformation.

Transformation is not the same as evolution, the former implying energy and guidance, while evolution can be a passive thing.

Back in 1948, Barbara Shalucha, a newly appointed instructor of botany at IU, didn't exactly wave a magic wand over the alfalfa, but it nevertheless disappeared because of her.

Shalucha, now an associate professor emeritus, calls herself co-founder of the Hilltop Garden, but she acknowledges the help of others — the late Professor Ralph E. Cleland, who was chair of the IU botany department, the late H.H. Binford, then superintendent of the



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Bloomington Schools, Jerry T. Femal, former director of the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department, Garrett Eppley, chairman of the parks and recreation department of the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, the women of the Bloomington Garden Club and last, but not least, University Chancellor Herman B Wells.

Shalucha came to the IU faculty with a depth of knowledge about horticulture and a prophetic sense of what working with the soil could do for children in their developmental years.

A fringe benefit for the university in the program was the opportunity for students to gain experience in the organization and running of an outdoor science project.

Her first efforts were organizational, weaving together those parts of the community who were most concerned — IU, the public schools, city recreation program and the garden club.

In her book, *The Garden Named Hilltop*, published in 1987, Shalucha wrote, "Through countless hours of discussion, we had to be quite clear in our minds as to what we were seeking to establish; there is quite a difference in a gardener actively engaged in organizing and managing his garden in context with his surrounding environment, conscious of the social consequences of his actions."

The practical application of that concept was simple — to take the

original one-acre site and measure out 9-foot-square plots to which elementary-school-age children are assigned.

A good working knowledge of how things grow comes from instruction as well as dirt-on-the-hands experience.

In time the one-acre area grew to five acres that encompassed vegetables, fruits and decorative plants.

And so, too, the program grew, enriched with the promise of awards, field trips and the annual camp-out at Hilltop.

Although Shalucha has expressed her debt to others, she has, more than any others, shaped the program with an intense energy, from concept to reality.

Today many of the beneficiaries of her dedication are scattered all over the world, taking with them the satisfaction of having teamed up with nature to produce growing

things that are practical or beautiful.

Through the years recognition has come to Shalucha in many forms, but perhaps the most important one was the 1988 Green Medal Award of the National Gardening Association.

Hilltop was named one of the top 10 youth gardens in the country.

Perhaps Shalucha's most important satisfaction comes from knowing that the garden program has touched the lives of more than 10,000 children and 1,500 student interns who have worked there.

Her gift to the children is expressed in her book.

"Our boys and girls are in a world dominated by sophisticated technology . . . Hilltop's program nurtures the magic of a child's curiosity. It teaches the child that to live in this world is no easy matter without standards to live by."