

# Friedrich Froebel

## Founder, First Kindergarten

Friedrich was a motherless child. Losing his mother before the age of 1, and being raised by a father who had little time for him and his two brothers, left Froebel with a yearning for something seemingly impossible to satisfy.

Froebel spent much of his time alone in the gardens surrounding his home. Here, as a young boy, he would play all day and explore his surroundings. This led to a deep love of nature that would remain with Froebel to the end of his days and influence all of his future achievements.

As a young man, Froebel accepted a teaching position at the Frankfurt Model School. Frankfurt Model School was based on the teachings of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a well respected educator of the day. Pestalozzi welcomed the poor into his school, including orphans practice that was revolutionary. His philosophy included the idea that children need to be active learners.

Froebel applied his "hands-on learning" approach when he left the school to be a private tutor. The parents of the children he tutored offered Froebel a small patch of their property to use as a garden. The learning experiences with the children in the garden convinced Froebel that action and direct observation were the best ways to educate.

In 1837 Friedrich Froebel founded his own school and called it "kindergarten," or the children's garden.

Prior to Froebel's kindergarten, children under the age of 7 did not attend school. It was believed that young children did not have the ability to focus or to develop cognitive and emotional skills before this age. However, Froebel expressed his own beliefs about the importance of early education in the following way: "... because learning begins when consciousness erupts, education must also."

Froebel labeled his approach to education as "self-activity." This idea allows the child to be led by his own interests and to freely explore them. The teacher's role, therefore, was

to be a guide rather than lecturer.

In the end, Froebel's most important gifts to children were the classroom, symbolically viewed as an extension of a lovely, thriving garden, and that which he needed most as a child — a teacher who took on the role of loving, supportive parent.

### A Classroom Garden

Children can discover Froebel's "gifts" with indoor garden experiences.

- 1) Plant window boxes with bulbs. Paper-white narcissus bulbs will grow and bloom quickly indoors.
- 2) Create a classroom terrarium in a clear fish tank. Fill the tank with layers of gravel, sand, and soil and plant with mosses and ferns. Caring for this mini-ecosystem lets children observe life.
- 3) Plant seeds of fast growing vines such as beans and sweet peas.

