

FLORIDA HEALTHY SCHOOLS

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SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY GARDENS

School and community gardens are not a new concept. The first school gardening movement began in the early 1890s, and during the Depression many people in urban areas planted gardens in order to survive. During WWII, President and Mrs. Roosevelt promoted victory gardens as a civic virtue. Vegetable gardens were everywhere, from front yards to vacant lots and the White House. Gardeners were encouraged to store and preserve food using canning and drying techniques.



Forty-two percent of the fresh vegetables consumed in 1943 came from "victory gardens".

The current interest in gardening is most often related to improving health through better nutrition and physical activity; increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables; reducing exposure to chemicals in food; decreasing family food budgets; and reducing hunger.

Earlier this year, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack, broke ground on the first People's Garden in front of USDA headquarters in Washington. USDA states that community gardens "unite neighborhoods in a common effort and inspire simple solutions to some of the most persistent issues plaguing our country from hunger to the environment."

USDA will plant several types of organic vegetables, culinary and medicinal herbs and pollinator friendly plants. They will plant some unique types of fibers, such as the flax plant used to make linen, and grains, such as sorghum and millet, to raise public awareness regarding agriculture. Its produce will be donated to local soup kitchens. More gardens are planned at USDA facilities around the country.

First Lady Michelle Obama also praises community gardens: "I'm a big believer in community gardens, both because of



their beauty and for their access to providing fresh fruits and vegetables to so many communities across this nation and the world." She enlisted the help of elementary school students to plant the White House garden in April.

The National Gardening Association reports that student participation in school gardens improves standardized test scores. The organization found that students in third and fifth grade classrooms who learned science through gardening scored higher than classrooms that did not use a garden.

Debra Haire-Joshua, PhD, Director of the St. Louis University Obesity Prevention Center states, "When children are involved in growing and cooking food, it improves their diets. Students of schools with gardens learn about math and science and they also eat more fruits and vegetables."

Many schools in Florida are using gardens as a tool for

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hands-on, student-centered learning. To learn more, visit the Florida Department of Education's school garden website at <http://www.fldoe.org/BII/CSHP/schoolgar.asp>

Benefits of School Gardens

- Gardens provide sensory stimulation of smells, textures, colors and sounds.
- Gardening is a healthy outdoor activity for all youth.
- Children are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables they grow and improve their attitude toward fruits and vegetables.
- Children can improve their self-esteem and attitudes toward school through gardening projects.
- Children can learn environmental stewardship and scientific principles.
- Community gardens foster group cohesion and improve interpersonal relationships.
- Gardening projects help foster family relationships and increase parental involvement.

Osceola School District Employee Wellness Program (“4 the Health of It!”)

To promote smart nutrition, an employee wellness garden was created in collaboration with the Osceola County Extension Service. Garden plots were assigned to departments, or groups of four employees. Garden bylaws and commitment agreements were signed by employees. Extension Service experts taught gardening classes and conducted garden clinics on: garden design, gardening basics, planting, fertilizing, pest control, maintaining your garden, harvesting, food safety and how to store your produce to get the longest shelf life. The classes were held as lunch and learns and early evening classes.

The goal was to increase employees’ consumption of fruits and vegetables, but it has been so much more! It has increased morale and a sense of community while increasing physical activity and promoting healthy eating. Gardeners prepared dishes from the harvested vegetables and shared with families and co-workers. Employees reported starting gardens at their homes and schools. Abundance was placed in the employee break room to share with other staff. Collaboration with the Osceola County Extension Services, an untapped community resource, proved to be very viable and their experts contributed greatly to the success of this project. Contact Candice Roberson robersonc@osceola.k12.fl.us

Collier County: Nine schools, that have an 80% or higher free or reduced lunch rate amongst their student population, were selected for the project. Part of this initiative called for teachers and students (4th and 5th graders) to plant fruit trees at their schools and educate 3rd grade class about the trees. The trees will provide the daily snack for the next 4th and 5th grade class in the 2011-2012 school year. Contact Stacy Revay at Stacy_Revay@doh.state.fl.us

Suwannee County: Container gardens were planted in small plastic swimming pools at a day care and a raised bed garden was built at Suwannee Elementary. Students were able to assist in the planting, weeding and care of the garden. The local Lowe’s Store and Farmers Cooperative donated supplies for the school garden. Additionally, we partnered with the Suwannee County Extension Office, Food and Nutrition Program, and the Master Gardener Program to offer assistance with the garden project. Contact Mary Ward at Mary_ward@doh.state.fl.us

Jefferson County: Partners included Jefferson County Health Department (the Healthy Communities and Healthy People Program, Environmental Health Program and volunteer employees), Jefferson County School Board, Jefferson County Elementary School (ESE students), Jefferson County Middle High School (ESE students and after-school program), Monticello Garden Club, North Florida Community College (Green Industries), University of Florida Extension Office, the local hardware store, parents and community members. A community garden and greenhouse were integrated as school class activities. The college and community organizations participated in set up and planting activities. Next steps are integration of the community garden activities in class curricula and use as an after-school program activity. Contact Sonia McNeilis at sonia_mcnelis@doh.state.fl.us

Baker County An undeveloped piece of land, owned by Baker County, was used to establish a community garden. The Ministerial Alliance, which oversees the Samaritan Food Bank, agreed to oversee the garden. The garden will be a teaching garden to teach community members how to grow their own food. Produce from the garden will be donated to the local food bank for those in need, who may also work in the garden and harvest food for themselves. A passionate advocate, who is an experienced gardener, was willing to take responsibility for the garden. Contact Pamela Jeralds at Pamela_Jeralds@doh.state.fl.us

Endeavor Elementary, Broward County: In September, kindergarteners with their first grade buddies, planted carrot seeds as an introduction to the garden. In October we started our Garden Mentor program between kindergarten and third grade. Approximately 96 kindergarteners and 90 third graders work in the garden. Our third grade students are teaching our kindergarten students about plants. In addition to planting the school garden kit seeds on gardening days, the third grade mentors also instruct the kindergarten students on the different parts of the plant and its uses. During October the garden buddies planted the carrot, lettuce and green bean seeds. We also shared some of these seeds with other classrooms that have an outside garden classroom container so they can observe the plant life cycle process.

To read success stories and see pictures of Florida Departments of Education and Health school gardening initiatives, go to <http://www.fldoe.org/BII/CSHP/schoolgar.asp>



Florida Agriculture
in the Classroom, Inc.
AGRICULTURE KEEPS FLORIDA GREEN

Florida Agriculture in the Classroom is a non-profit organization based in Gainesville and charged with helping teachers in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade educate students about the Florida agriculture industry. Florida Agriculture in the Classroom will provide 222 \$500 mini-grants that must go toward creating or improving a school garden that grows Florida fruits and vegetables. Florida certified general education teachers engaged in classroom instruction at the pre-kindergarten through 12th grade level are eligible. The grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Proposals can be submitted through the Florida Agriculture in the Classroom website www.flagintheclassroom.com beginning Sept. 1.

Teachers who receive the grant will receive a copy of Florida Agriculture in the Classroom's new resource, **Gardening for Grades**. The full-color, 142-page book was written for educators and shows teachers the entire process of starting and maintaining a classroom or schoolyard garden. The book begins with the planning stages of a garden, such as how to secure support from school administrators to use school property and how to find grant funding to pay for supplies. The book then helps teachers decide what types of fruits or vegetables to plant depending on their location, and it offers advice on using the garden to teach core subject areas. There are a dozen lessons and activities in the book that show teachers how to use the garden to teach language arts, math, science and social studies concepts.

In addition, **Gardening for Grades** will be offered free to all Florida teachers, thanks to a partnership with the Florida Department of Education's Office of Healthy Schools and Food & Nutrition Management Section. Teachers can order the book at the Agriculture in the Classroom website. Workshops will be held throughout the state in the fall of 2011 to train teachers on how to use the book.

The primary source of funding for Agriculture in the Classroom is the specialty license plate known as the "Ag Tag." Additional funding for this project comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, among others. For more information on this press release, contact Florida Agriculture in the Classroom Executive Director Lisa Gaskalla at 352-846-1391 or via e-mail at Gaskalla@ufl.edu. For more information on Florida Agriculture in the Classroom, visit: www.flagintheclassroom.com

Good News in Florida

October is National Farm to School Month. The Florida Department of Education, Food and Nutrition Management in partnership with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Food Distribution will be hosting the **First Annual Florida Grown School Lunch Week on October 24-28, 2011**. The week will kick off with an event at the Capitol Courtyard on Monday, October 24, 2011 from 10:00 am – 1:00 pm in Tallahassee (in the event of inclement weather this event will be held on the 22nd floor). The event will highlight locally grown products in school lunches, demonstrations by culinary staff that work with growers and schools, displays from school districts which showcase local foods in school lunches, and school-based nutrition education activities to promote locally grown and raised food. Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services Adam Putnam, will be in attendance, and Governor Rick Scott and Education Commissioner Gerald Robinson have been invited to proclaim October 24-28, 2011 as Florida Grown School Week. If you are interested in attending or exhibiting, please contact katie.rainka@fldoe.org

Cathy Reed, the new Director of Nutrition for Leon County schools, is setting up a Supper Program. The Supper Program will be at schools with the most need. They will start off with cold meals like sandwiches, and move up to hot food meals when the weather starts to get a little cooler. "We have the opportunity now to provide them with a more substantial meal before they go home, which may improve them studying, or at least they will have a full tummy when they go to bed at night." The program is funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Contact Cathy Reed at reedc@leonschools.net

This newsletter is provided by the **Florida Coordinated School Health Partnership (CSHP)**. CSHP is a grassroots public-private partnership whose members include not-for-profit organizations, businesses, insurance companies, professional associations, child health advocates, and health and education representatives.

Vision: Health literate and health practicing students and staff in all Florida schools.

Purpose: Facilitating the creation of policies and environments that provide students and staff the opportunity to reach their personal potential by means of positive health related decision making skills and access to health care.

Focus: Our goals focus on reducing/eliminating the barriers to learning and supporting academic achievement. <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Family/CSHP/index.html>



Flagler DJJ Gardening Project Feeds the Hungry

Two years ago, the Flagler County Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Council adopted the mission of creating a community garden, to help feed Flagler's hungry. The Council added their own original twist: by donating all harvested fruits and vegetables to local food pantries to be distributed to those in need.

Flagler is Florida's hardest-hit county by far in the proportion of its unemployed.

There are quite a few things that differentiate this garden from others. Beyond dispersing hundreds of pounds of home grown food, the garden has sparked interest in similar projects not only in Flagler

County, but nation wide. Last year, the Flagler County DJJ Community Garden was recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture by being designated as one of two "People's Gardens."

In 2010 the Garden's Advisory Council was awarded runner-up for the Outstanding Community Volunteer Group of the Year. Recently the council was recognized as a *Daily Points of Light Award* honoree by *The Points Of Light Institute*, established by President George H. W. Bush, which recognizes individuals and groups inspiring meaningful change in communities across America.

In response to the garden's reputation, the idea has grown and similar projects are being created throughout the community and in local schools. It seems that everyone is exercising the idea of planting a seed and donating a meal. Youth participating in the Flagler County's Youth Center prompted its students to vote daily online in a national competition to win a mini-orchard, sponsored by Edy's Fruit Bars.

Not only did the effort prove successful, but it generated a



Youth-In-Action Work Day, at the garden, to actually plant the orchard. Without a doubt, the Flagler County's DJJ Community Garden is, truly, a garden of and for Flagler's people.

The DJJ Community Garden is located close to many schools and organizations, drawing support from multiple resources including youth, civic, religious and community organizations and others.

The Flagler County Youth Center's Summer Program invited its campers to assist in the cause. In the photograph, above you will see pro-active teens planting seeds to help feed Flagler County's hungry.

Contact Janet Reilly at Reilly_Janet@bah.com



A unique feature is the addition or raised hydroponic gardens that provide access to gardeners in wheelchairs.