

Waconia Public Schools

1650 Community Drive
Waconia, Minnesota 55387



JeffersFoundation.org

Summary

The Waconia Edible School Classroom contains several gardens and an orchard. The “edible classroom” is designed to teach students about the “seed to table” progression. In the summer months, Kid’s Company participants maintain all the gardens and enjoy fresh products served in the lunchroom.

Photos



left, Waconia’s school garden program sports its own professional logo.

above, Summer school and Kids Club students have regular activities in the garden.

right, above, Both cherry and apple trees are included in the school orchard.

right, Sponsors get recognition on the garden fence.

Details

The Waconia Edible Classroom is located on farmland adjacent to Clearwater Middle School and was started in 2008. The garden site includes a ½ acre vegetable garden, 65 fruit trees, and offers a dozen community plots for rent. The Edible Classroom is an outdoor learning space that gives students the opportunity to experience the seed-to-table process through hands on learning.

A Community Garden Takes Root

The Waconia Edible Classroom is a hands-on learning experience which was spearheaded by current middle school principal Peter Gustafson, school board and superintendent Nancy Rajanen. Located on the former Jerome Brown farm next to Clearwater Middle School, The Edible Classroom was developed for the students of Waconia Public Schools to teach students about the “seed to table” progression. Connections are made between foods they eat and where it comes from, with the goal of fostering environmental stewardship and healthier eating habits.

Over the course of five years, the garden has “sprung to life” with additional projects completed

yearly. The first few years were learning experiences both for students and staff. Along with crops, they found that weeds were also grown in hefty quantities. Under the direction of coordinator, Leah Pierce, ideas started springing up. In addition to fruits and vegetables, flowers and annuals are planted in the garden. Students get to see firsthand native species and embrace the beauty of flowers. Bees, butterflies, frogs and other insects can be observed by simply taking the time to sit down on a bench and be still.

An irrigation system was installed to help the large chore of watering such an immense area. Rainwater is collected in an adjacent pond and then used to water the garden

The summer of 2012 three summer interns were introduced to the garden with to help with the coordinator's tasks of planning, planting, harvesting and working with the Kids Company program. Along with three new interns, the summer of 2013 welcomed fourteen raised beds built by industrial technology students under the direction of their teacher, John Kelzer. These were added to existing garden space, increasing accessibility and production.

Summer school students helped to install and fill these beds as well as create the wood chips surrounding them. That summer also included the garden's first entries into the local county fair. This resulted in five first place ribbons and one second place along with a Reserve Champion in the vegetable category. Plans to expand this area are in the works for the 2014 growing season.

How does our garden grow?

Early in the spring, students start seeds indoors under grow lights. Once the weather is feasible they are transplanted to the garden outside. Individuals classrooms have planned and executed projects including: planting herbs a "Three Sister Garden" consisting of corn, beans and squash. See: <http://www.reneesgarden.com/articles/3sisters.html>

As the summer months take over, Kids Company participants, coordinators, summer school students and local volunteers tend to the garden. Students in the Kids Company program range from ages 3 to 12 while summer school includes grades 5 to 7. Summer staff incorporates mini-garden lessons, cooking demonstrations, and taste testing of various vegetables and fruits. Even on rainy days, when the garden is not accessible, indoor art activities relating to the garden are completed by the students.

Harvesting and preparing to put the garden "to bed," once again shifts back to classrooms and teachers as school returns to session in the fall. The Clearwater Garden Club, made up of middle school students, also works on several of these tasks meeting once weekly shortly after school starts.

Food grown in the Edible Classroom is directly taken to the kitchen for student consumption through the school lunch program. Most of the items make their way to the salad bar or are harvested when possible to coordinate with the current lunch menu. The few short weeks in August when students are not in the building, harvested food is taken to the local food shelf to assist community members in need.

Nurturing Community Involvement

Along with school students, the community is invited to volunteer time, money and resources to the garden project. Dozens of business owners and volunteers stepped up immediately and enthusiastically to support the garden and helped make it the success it has become today. From the donation of seeds, tools, plants, machinery, time and effort the site has encouraged hundreds of people to catch the bug to grow plants, grow young minds and grow the Waconia Edible Classroom.

(Waconia Public School News, Spring 2009)

http://www.studio-arts.com/CommuniCAT7_LR.pdf

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