Backyard Growers

Meghan Stratton - School Programs Manager
Abby Johnstone - FoodCorps Service Member

Salad Days: Using school gardens to launch Farm to School programs, policies, and culture in your school

Our Story

Backyard Growers is a grassroot nonprofit working to reshape Gloucester's relationship with food through home, school, and community gardens.

Home

School

Community

An Outside Perspective:

“You guys are successful because everyone likes working with you. You work within our school systems. You anticipate problems, and avoid them so it doesn’t become a problem for us. You make it easy.”

- Principal at Beeman Elementary School

School Garden Barriers:
Institutional & Practical

School Systems

Seasonal mismatch

Infrastructure:
Not built for gardens or scratch cooking

Limited funding

Lack of growing knowledge

Demands on student time
Ie. time spent on learning & short lunches

Gardens

Space & time

Planting plans

Upkeep

Seasonality

Region

Student preference

Build gardens with a purpose; garden with a plan

Classroom tool “teacher beds”

Supply school meals

Supply garden taste tests

After school enrichment

Schoolwide garden participation

Our purpose: Give 100% of Gloucester students the opportunity to grow their own food with limited inputs from stakeholders

District wide & event-based

No time, no money, no “green thumb”

3 garden visits per year

2 complete seed-to-fork experiences

1 hour student time

Tastings, not sourcing

Reliable crops with limited needs

Limited interchangeable materials

Salad Days & Fall Harvest

April Planting

June Salad Days Harvest
&
Fall Harvest Planting

September
Fall Harvest

Taste Tests

- Celebration of vegetables!
- Opportunity to try a new food
- During lunch: captive audience
- Simple preparation
    - Identifiable
    - Low input

➔ Build relationships with kitchen staff
➔ Get kids excited about vegetables on the menu
➔ School & community culture of healthy eating!

Our Crops

Salad Days: Spring Salad Greens - *Leaf Varieties*

Fall Harvest Day:
Pre-K - Sunflowers
K - Pumpkins
1 - Squash
2 - Beans
3 - Potatoes
4 - Beets
5 - Carrots

Factors:

- Seasonal fit
  - Plant early, harvest late
  - Time to maturity
- Appeal to students
  - Appearance & taste
- Reliability
- Limited maintenance
  - Weeding
  - Watering
  - Pruning
- Seed size
- Temptation

Strong Foundation: Dispersed Responsibility

Principals & Administrators
School garden champions
&
"Keys" to the school

Teachers
Positive role models
Bring their students to the garden & make connections

Parents
(Sometimes students!)
Reinforce healthy community mentality!

Support teachers

Help maintain gardens

Food Service
"Keys" to the kitchen

Vegetable storage and possibly prep/cooking

Small successes =>wider interest!

Teachers see the possible extensions & natural connections

Kids WILL eat the vegetables

Increased comfort with using the garden & produce from the garden!

Everyone sees it’s not a huge undertaking

All of our school programs are based on this model

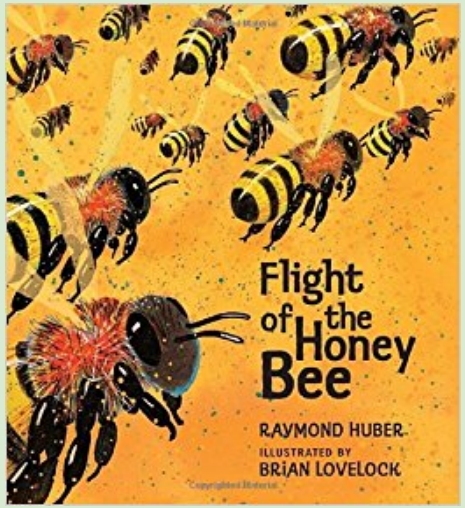
- Preschool stone soup program
- 6th grade popcorn science program
- 7th grade wheat project
- Growing modules for high school culinary, ecology, environmental studies, and health classes

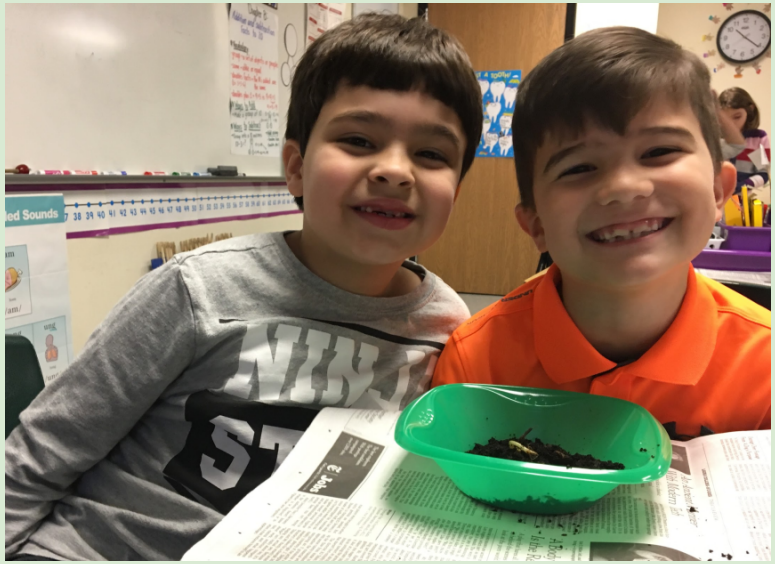
Adaptability

- Food service capacity
  - In class salad making
  - Crop selection/use
    - Decomposition of pumpkin
    - Carrots (eat them raw!)
- Student age
  - All in one day: salad picnic
  - 5th grade garden leads
- Number of classes
  - Mix up what each class plants
  - Grade level specific
- Materials
- Food safety

Beyond the School Garden

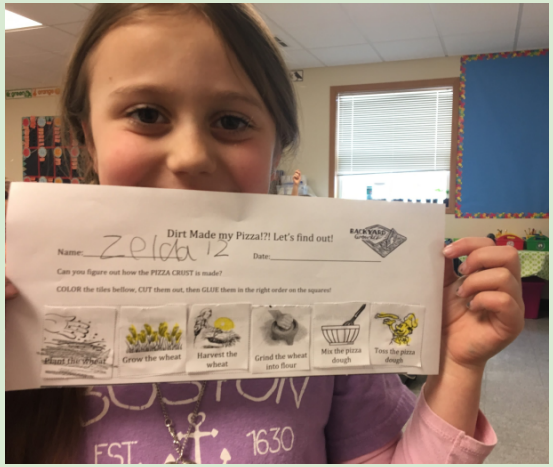
- ➔ Decomposition of a pumpkin observation
- ➔ Classroom worm bins
- ➔ Pollinators
- ➔ Science journals
- ➔ Windowsill plants
- ➔ Reading!





Using the Garden as a Classroom Tool

- Area, perimeter, measurements, etc.
- Constitution & governance
- Cycles and steps in a process
- Heredity and traits
- Currency (money & counting)
- Writing: perspective
- Adjectives, comparisons, and superlatives
- Multiplication & division
- Geography and climate
- Plant parts
- Fractions
- Colonial America
- Poetry (cycles)



BONUS: Can you think of a food systems extension?!? How can we get students thinking about the ecosystems, people, plants, animals, and systems behind their food?

Code Switching: Classroom

CURRICULUM

Elementary

Sequencing
Letter writing
Cycles
Basic math
Colors & textures
Observations

Middle school

Observations and inferences
Chemical reactions
Circulatory and nervous systems
Tectonic plates

Dirty hands

Seeds

Winter

Pictures!

Veggie show & tell

Chickens

Hats

Worms

Production

Hand prints

Supply costs

WINTER

Virtual field trip

$$ & allergies

MAYHEM

Lice policy

Squeamish

Education

Farm to School in the Cafeteria

Keep it simple!

Keep your goal in mind!

Code Switching: Kitchens (Think

Baskets

Spiders

Dirt & Blemishes

Storage crops

Bumper crop/huge veggies

Try things!

Deliveries

Disposable

SPIDERS!?!

Food safety

Peeling / spoilage

Waste

Allergies

Storage shortage

But we Don’t Have a Nonprofit, a Garden Manager, or A FoodCorps Service Member!

Partner with a nonprofit: Replicated by The Food Project in Lynn & (soon) by Growing Places in Fitchburg

Single school: school team!

- Rockport
- Manchester
- Essex
- Marblehead

District wide: Find a unifier

- Chicopee
- Webster (TBD)

Food for thought

Pond Vi
hearing

MIKE SPRINGER/Staff photo

Fifth-graders Braydon Wall and Madison Slier plant lettuce seeds Wednesday at Rockport Elementary School. Students throughout the school planted seeds. They will harvest the various varieties of lettuce in May and eat them in salads in the school cafeteria.

ESSEX CALENDAR