



Gardening with Class



A newsletter of the San Diego Regional School Garden Resource Center

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Spring 2008 Issue

Growing Together

School garden programs in San Diego County are experiencing a burst of growth, thanks to the California Instructional School Garden (CISG) grant, and also thanks to improved coordination and communication between organizations that work to support schools gardens. The School Garden Resource Center aims to help sustain garden-based learning programs by connecting teachers and garden coordinators to funding resources, reference information, curriculum ideas and more. School gardens promote consumption of fruits and vegetables, positive attitudes toward learning, environmental awareness, and constructive social skills. We're on the right path, and we're in it together!

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After the Bell : School Garden Clubs for Kids

By Mindy Swanson, Garden Coordinator at Birney Elementary School

Here's a common story - the school garden is being used by a class or two, but not cared for except by one or two dedicated teachers or parent volunteers. To provide the chance for all interested children to use the garden, consider starting a garden club. You can formalize the club and teach leadership, such as the 4H program (<http://cesandiego.ucdavis.edu/4-H/>), or you can do something less formal and more homegrown. Whatever option you choose, this club can offer wonderful opportunities to include your school community in the care, maintenance and enjoyment of the garden's bounty.



Members of Birney Elementary School Garden Club, with Chef Tom Piergrossi.

Many clubs meet after school. The staff running your after-school program may be willing to run the club, or you might find a dedicated teacher or parent to lead the group. Some after-school programs have funding available to pay for staff or supplies for your club. Your school may also have a CISG Grant that has not been spent, which may be used to purchase tools & other necessities that can also be shared by classrooms during the school day.

A typical garden club may last from 1 – 2 hours after school. Activities will be heavily driven by the needs in your garden. For example, if there are lots of weeds, a lesson on weeding would be appropriate. Always offer alternate activities - students who might not be interested in weeding can help "double dig" a garden bed, or do leaf rubbings with plants in the garden. Some children will be drawn to writing or art activities – offer them a garden journal in which to record their weekly observations, or to sketch the growth of a seed they planted.

There are many curricula available that can support the development of your garden. One example is the TWIGS Curriculum. Through 30 lessons (15 garden-related and 15 nutrition-oriented), students and adults work with each other to learn about soil, garden design, tool care, seeds, composting and nutritious ways to enjoy your harvest.

(continued on pg. 4)

Raising the “Three Sisters”

By Vincent Lazaneo, Horticultural Advisor, UC Cooperative Extension

Native peoples from different parts of North America used a wide range of agricultural techniques. One of the best known is the interplanting of corn, beans and squash together. This crop trio was considered “The Three Sisters” by Iroquois Indians of the east. Growing these companion crops in a school garden can inspire students to learn more about Native American agriculture, nutrition, customs, and folklore.

These companion crops benefit each other. Tall growing corn provides support for pole beans, while the beans convert nitrogen from the air into a form plants can use. Corn requires a lot of nitrogen for healthy growth. The nitrogen remaining in the soil after the beans have grown will be available for the corn the following year. Squash has large leaves, which shade the soil and help control weeds. The sisters also compliment each other nutritionally. Corn and squash provide carbohydrates and beans provide protein.

To plant “the three sisters”, most sites recommend creating low mounds 18”-36” across. These small mounds provide better soil drainage in areas that receive summer rain. If you use this system in our dry summer climate, flatten the top of each mound and make a shallow depression to keep water from running off.

Corn, beans and squash are warm season crops. In coastal & inland valleys of San Diego county, plant seed in garden soil from April to mid June in a sunny location. For good germination, the soil must be warm (60-70°F), or seed may rot. Dig soil about a foot deep to prepare it for planting and mix in some fertilizer. Native Americans sometimes buried a dead fish as fertilizer, but you can buy a small bag of fish meal at a local nursery. If you have enough space, compare 3 plantings of the same crop using fish meal, commercial slow release fertilizer (Osmocote 14-14-14) & no added fertilizer.



Water slowly until the soil is wet. After a few days when the surface is dry, use your finger to make planting holes and place seed at the depth recommended on the seed packet, then gently firm soil over them. Check the soil moisture every few days, but do not water unless the soil begins to feel dry at the depth where the seed were planted. Seed may rot if the soil is kept too wet. Seedlings should sprout in 1-2 weeks. Protect them from birds, snails and insect pests.

Plant the corn first and wait until the plants are 4”- 6” tall before planting the beans. Once the beans start growing, you may need to guide the bean tendrils to the corn stalks. Each tendril will wind around the stalk & the developing ears of corn. Squash seeds get planted about a week after the beans. For diagrams and more detailed information on how to grow a Three Sisters Garden, visit these websites and enter “three sisters” in the search box:

- Native American Technology & Art: www.nativetech.org
- The National Gardening Association’s Kids Gardening Website: www.kidsgardening.com

Top School Garden e-newsletters

If you are not currently signed up for these fantastic monthly e-newsletters, join now! These newsletters include timely grant announcements and links to curricula, events, sample lessons, and many more resources. They will be delivered automatically to your inbox, so you don’t have to track down the information yourself.

Kids Garden News, from the National Gardening Association: <http://www.garden.org/subscriptions/>

Junior Master Gardeners: <http://www.jmgkids.us/grow>

California School Garden Network “Sowing and Growing”: <http://www.csgn.org/join.php>



Announcements!



Want to join our mailing list? Have suggestions for future articles? Please email Diana@rcdsandiego.org or call (619) 562-0096, and give us your name, school / organization, & address.

- **“The Most Bountiful Place on Earth!”** 2008 National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference on June 25-28, 2008 in Costa Mesa, CA. Register by May 20 at www.cfaitc.org/Conference/national.php
- **Creating and Sustaining Your School Garden** An interest list is forming for a school garden workshop in Fall 2008. This workshop provides a comprehensive introduction to school gardens, covering topics from construction to curriculum. Schools are encouraged to send a team, including teachers, parents, volunteers, school administrators, etc. All participants will receive an organic lunch, the new book *Gardens for Learning* published by the California School Garden Network, and a binder with resource materials. Please send an email to Diana@rcdsandiego.org if you would like to receive more information in the fall.
- **California Fertilizer Foundation School Garden Grant Program** The California Fertilizer Foundation annually provides 24 grants for \$1,200 each to schools throughout California. At the end of each year, winning schools can re-apply for a progress grant of \$1,500 and a free agricultural field trip. Deadline: June 15, 2008 Web site: www.calfertilizer.org Questions: Pam Emery at (916) 574-9744.
- **School garden grant opportunities** are now posted on a GRANT CALENDAR found on the “School Programs” web page of the Master Gardeners Association of San Diego, www.mastergardenerssandiego.org. Several are due June 1—apply now!
- **Win a prize at the San Diego County Fair!** To enter a school-grown item in the County Fair, go to <http://www.sdfair.com/fair/> and click on “Contests and Competitive Exhibits.” There is also a link to school programs, many of which are free, and are ideal for year-round schools. For more information contact Jill Coughlin at (858) 755-1161 x2407.

What to do during summer break???

Warm season vegetables should already be in the ground by now. If not already, you will soon be enjoying strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, zucchini, and more. If you're on a traditional school calendar, it's troubling to know that the most productive vegetable growing time of the year is the time when all the kids are on vacation! So what do you do with your garden program during summer?

- ☺ Solicit dependable community members to tend it over the summer months, and in exchange they will receive a bounty of summer vegetables. Note: If you want pumpkins for Halloween or Thanksgiving, sow the seeds in June (“Sugar Pie” variety is great for pies. Try “Happy Jack” for carving) and keep the garden growing until Fall. Most pumpkins varieties take 110 - 120 days to mature.
- ☺ If your garden is left fallow in summer, be sure to mulch bare ground with straw or other organic material. This will reduce water loss and suppress weeds.
- ☺ Focus your garden more on native plants, which often go dormant in summer and begin growing again when rains come in San Diego's “winter” (December/January). Blooms arrive in March.

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School Garden Conference— a packed house!

The 2008 San Diego Regional School Garden and Nutrition Conference took place on Saturday, April 19th at the Del Mar Fairgrounds. There were 3 sessions of workshops with great standards-related topics, such as Native American's use of plants, math lessons in the garden, and how to create an outdoor science learning lab. Others learned about composting, creating water-wise and wildlife-friendly garden habitats, nutrition, and our valuable local insects. In addition, this year's bus tour took attendees to Solana Vista Elementary School's beautiful school garden. Congratulations to all who won a prize in our fabulous raffle; over \$1200 in prizes were given away! Thank you to all who attended, donated funds, and volunteered to help make this day a wonderful success. See you next year!



*Happy raffle
winner with
their prizes,
donated by
Solana
Succulents.*

“Half the interest of a garden is the constant
exercise of the imagination.”

~Mrs. C.W. Earle

(After the Bell, continued from page 1)

Eating the food you grow is an essential part of gardening. Sometimes that will mean harvesting leaves from your greens or snap peas or beans and rinsing and eating. Other times you can make a cold dish, such as a salsa or bruschetta. If you have an enthusiastic chef in the crowd you can make cooked dishes such as soups or sauces. Whether it is just harvesting and tasting the fresh food or preparing a dish, cooking is a way to help students try new vegetables and experience the yummy produce from your garden. Often you get converts – veggie lovers who did not realize the amazing taste of a carrot pulled right from the garden.

*Don't be surprised when your garden club becomes the most
popular club on campus!*

TWIGS curriculum is available free of charge to qualifying schools and for a modest price for schools who are not qualified. Contact Mindy Swanson at (858) 495-5260 or msswanson@ucdavis.edu