

HOME

CELEBRITY

HEALTH & FOOD

SPECIAL REPORTS

MAGAZINE

Start your search here...

[FIRST TAKE](#) | [INTELLIGENCE REPORT](#) | [WHAT PEOPLE EARN](#) | [DICTATORS](#) | [WHERE AMERICA LIVES](#) | [ALL AMERICA](#) | [PARADE PICKS](#)

Search Health Information

Powered by iMedix



1 of 1

Breaking New Ground

by Joanna Prisco

published: 09/20/2009



An outdoor classroom (photo by Kelly Regan)

Not so long ago, most school cafeteria choices were limited to mystery meat and starchy sides or fast foods such as pizza and tacos brought in from an outside vendor. But a new age has dawned for young lunchroom diners. More and more schools are integrating gardening into their curricula and using schoolyard-grown produce in lunches to cultivate a taste for healthy dishes.

According to the National Gardening Association, about 25,000 schools nationwide currently involve students in gardening, using plots as outdoor classrooms for teaching subjects that range from math and science to art and music. But clearly the greatest benefit to exercising kids' green thumbs is reconnecting them with the practice of growing healthy food and learning about nutrition: Nearly 84% of the U.S. population lives in metropolitan areas, and many Americans have lost touch with where fresh fruits and vegetables come from—if they eat them at all.

“We got everyone involved in the planning process of building a garden,” explains Donna Cavato, director of the Edible Schoolyard New Orleans (ESY NOLA). “Kids, teachers, families—all of us as a community were able to develop what we wanted it to look like.” Ninety-eight percent of the children in the neighborhood live below the poverty line, but they were able to raise money for their project with the help of the Emeril Lagasse Foundation and other private partners. “The families were hesitant to get their hopes up,” Cavato says. “They’ve been promised many things. But over the first summer, we were able to build the garden. When kids returned that fall, there were literally tears, because people were so overjoyed.”

7 ways to get kids to eat healthy

Modeled after the original Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley, Calif.—built 12 years ago by chef Alice Waters—ESY NOLA features an expansive organic garden. Plant beds are devoted to everything from lettuces and broccoli to patches of strawberries and blueberries. Organic growing is incorporated into every facet of learning: A small wetland area that plays host to myriad microorganisms is used for science lessons, and seasonal cooking classes are taught in the school kitchen.

“We have transformed what a public school experience can be for our students,” Cavato says. “And we’re transforming the relationship that kids have with their food. Essentially, if they grow it and they cook it, they will eat it.”

That’s not just wishful thinking, either. A 2007 study by the St. Louis University School of Public Health found that kids who ate home-grown produce were more than twice as likely to eat at least the FDA-recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables a day as those who rarely or never ate home-grown produce.

These findings were echoed in more recent analyses by the Center for Weight and Health at the University of California, Berkeley. “The study demonstrates that students who have high exposure to kitchen and garden programs show an increase in knowledge and a change in attitudes and behaviors about food,” says Alice Waters, whose Chez Panisse Foundation underwrote the research as part of its mission to use food to nurture, educate, and empower young people.

“We introduce kids to foods they may have never tasted,” Cavato says. “But we are also celebrating the indigenous food around us: satsumas, bell peppers, okra, mustard and turnip greens, sweet and sour kumquats, and Meyer lemons.”

Food to make kids smart

In turn, the children often introduce new foods to their families. Roshena MacPherson, 16, attends the Language Academy of Sacramento, which also has an edible garden. “After growing up with small, mushy blackberries from the grocery store,” she says, “it was crazy picking juicy blackberries over an inch long from the school gardens.”

It may be relatively easy to harvest fruit in Louisiana and California, but warm climates aren’t the only places worth sowing seeds of change.

"Last winter, I was approached by five schools that wanted to start gardens," says Jeanne Pinsof Nolan, founder of The Organic Gardener in Chicago, where she helps families, schools, and businesses create their own organic gardens.

And even if the land around a school is undesirable, there are still ways to create garden environments for students.

Help your kids to eat well

"In Humboldt Park, an inner-city neighborhood, all of the soil around one school was very toxic and prohibited us from gardening in the earth," Nolan says. "We designed a series of raised 4-x-8 beds built on top of concrete so children could still benefit from working with fruits and vegetables. In other cases, I've found that schools turn to rooftops when greenspace is limited or toxic."

With that kind of ingenuity taking root, it's conceivable that someday all schools could have edible schoolyards and lessons drawn from gardening. Alice Waters, for one, will not rest until that dream becomes a reality.

"Every public school child in America deserves a delicious, healthy school meal prepared with fresh ingredients," says Waters, who believes that "strapped parents deserve schools that safeguard and promote their children's physical well-being and academic achievement, not the continued spread of childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes, and other diet-related diseases. When school kitchens use locally sourced foods, they not only nurture children, they also support job creation and the health of local economies and the environment." Now, that's food for thought.

1 of 1

Keyword Search: garden school child nutrition education

Search Health Information

Powered by iMedix



Sponsored Links

DON'T Pay For White Teeth

Dentists don't want you to know THIS teeth whitening secret. Read More. www.News28Online.com

Crohn's Disease

Living with CD? Get More Info and Sign Up For Updates & Healthy Tips. www.LivingwithCrohnsDisease.com

JOBLESS Mom Makes \$75/HR.

Making \$8400/Month ONLINE. Read her story and learn how you can too. World13News.com/Finance

[Buy a link here](#)

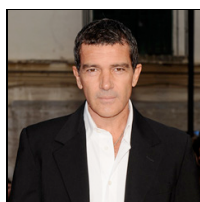
Add Comment | Total: 0

Please note: comments are subject to delay.

MORE FROM PARADE



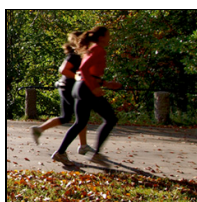
Gisele Bundchen's Baby Talk



Antonio Banderas: Melanie And I Live Day By Day



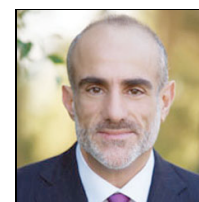
Exclusive Photos of Drew Barrymore



Prevent Post-Workout Pain



7 Steps To Reaching Your Goals



Rescuing The World's Scholars

PARADE.COM
Home
Contact Us
About Us
Media Relations
Advertising Info
Parade Classroom

CELEBRITY
Interviews
Hollywood Wire
Photo Galleries
Quizzes

HEALTH & FOOD
Health Features
Food & Recipes
Photo Galleries

SPECIAL REPORTS
First Take
Intelligence Report
What People Earn
Dictators
Where America Lives
All America

MAGAZINE
This Week's Issue
Past Issues
Ask Marilyn
Numbrix
Facebook
RSS Feeds
Parade Picks

Partners: Abilene Reporter-News : AL.com : Albany Democrat-Herald : Albuquerque Journal : American Press : Anchorage Daily News : Appeal-Democrat : Arizona Daily Star : Arkansas Democrat Gazette : Beaumont Enterprise : Billings Gazette : Calkins Newspapers : Cape Coral Daily Breeze : Centre Daily Times : Cleveland.Com : Corvallis Gazette-Times : Daily Reporter : Daily News-Sun : Dayton Daily News : Denver Post : East Oregonian : Gettysburg Times : Hoosier Times : Idaho Press : Idaho Statesman : Idaho State Journal : Independent Mail : Johnson City Press : Kansas City Star : Ledger-Enquirer : Lehighvalleylive.com : Lexington Herald Leader : Mankato Free Press : Masslive.com : Milive.com : Minot Daily News : Modesto Bee : Naples News : New Haven Register : News & Record : Nj.com : Nola.com : Northwest FLA Daily