



Cultivating Healthy Young Minds and Bodies Down Under

Thu, 02/03/2011 - 08:24 -- Josephene Duffy

When Roger asked for contributions to the KGI newsletter on school gardens, I couldn't resist the opportunity to share a bit of my organization's work in Australia. I work as the communications director for the [The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation](#) [1].

The Foundation was started by Stephanie, a renowned Australian chef, at Collingwood College in inner-city Melbourne in 2004. The Program proved such a success that now 180 schools across Australia are involved.

Stephanie had been aware of the growing obesity problem in Australia and internationally, and felt it was largely caused by people simply not knowing how to prepare fresh, nutritious and delicious food. She believes the problem begins in childhood, and that the best way to address it is by means of early intervention. While many educational food programs are well-intentioned, they neglect to involve children in an engaging, pleasurable system.

Inspired by her childhood memories of a kitchen garden, parents passionate about food and a family culture that focused on the ritual of sharing a meal, Stephanie developed the philosophy of the Kitchen Garden Program to ensure children were enthusiastic about the food production process from start to finish, were encouraged to be proud of their achievements, and were given the skills and understanding that would inform them for life.

Her model does away with rules and focuses on the pleasurable aspects of preparing meals, suggesting that positive food habits can only be created when they are fun.

What is the Kitchen Garden Program?

Our mantra is growing, harvesting, preparing, sharing. Kitchen Garden Schools commit to a dynamic and innovative model whereby kitchen and garden classes are run weekly, enabling skills-based learning that extends across the entire school curriculum.

Children across Years 3 to 7 (from about 8 to 12 years old) spend a minimum of 45 minutes a week in an extensive vegetable garden that they have helped design, build and maintain on the school grounds according to organic gardening principles.



1 ½ hours each week in a kitchen classroom

preparing and sharing a wonderful variety of meals created from their produce. The school employs two part-time specialist staff, a Garden Specialist and a Kitchen Specialist, to run these sessions. The kitchen and garden classes work in partnership with each other, so that they form a harmonious cycle.

In both the kitchen and the garden the children work together in small groups with the assistance of community volunteers. The finished dishes are arranged with pride and care on tables set with flowers from the garden, and the shared meal is a time for students, helpers, teachers and specialists to enjoy each other's company and conversation.

There are two unique factors about the Kitchen Garden Program. The first is the intrinsic link between the garden, the kitchen and the table. The emphasis is on learning about food and about eating it. No part of the Program can exist without the other. The second factor is that the Program is embedded in the curriculum ? it becomes a part of the school's program for four years of a child's life.

How do you get involved?

In Australia, schools have been supported in implementing the Kitchen Garden Program through a number of different national and state government funding opportunities. Currently, a new round of funding will be available to Victorian schools as of February 2011, while schools across Australia are invited to apply for funding from May 2011. (Please see our website and register for our newsletter for more details on how your school can get involved.)

For those schools (and other organisations) who don't have access to government funding, we invite you to join our Kitchen Garden Subscription Program, which enables schools, organisations and individuals to create their own version of the successful Kitchen Garden Program and draw on the knowledge and expertise gained by the Kitchen Garden Foundation over many years of intensive practice.

Want to know more?

The extensive Kitchen Garden Foundation website shows our participating schools, provides more detail on how the Program works and lets you know how you can get involved. Please visit the site and register for our newsletter to keep up to date with the amazing Kitchen Garden Program:

www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au [1]

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