

Cafeteria Chronicles: School Gardens

School gardens grow more than just food.

Hands-on learning in a school garden teaches students about growing food while nudging them toward healthier meal choices too. At **Port Townsend School District 50** in Port Townsend, WA, grant funds were used to hire a school gardener to grow basil, rosemary, dill, oregano, thyme, and cilantro in the school garden. Students learn how to grow herbs and to use their sense of taste and smell to identify the herbs. The district also trained the school nutrition staff in building flavor from herbs in place of salt, resulting in new recipes with reduced sodium on their lunch menu. Some of their new recipes include herb roasted potatoes (with garlic and rosemary) and taco meat (with cumin, garlic, paprika and oregano). Food service director Shannon Gray sees students eating fresh produce because of the school garden, and some parents have shared stories about their children asking for more fresh vegetables at home to mimic what they see at school!

The art of preserving food allows students to enjoy school grown produce year-round at **Marcola School District 79J** in Marcola, OR. After hiring a part-time farmer with grant funds, students were taught how to harvest and preserve food from the school garden by canning, freezing or fermenting food. Heritage squash grown in the school garden was used to make a cheese sauce for the district's mac and cheese recipe, upping the flavor while reducing sodium. Students in Marcola's culinary program learn to grow, harvest and prepare a meal with school-grown produce with the goal of reproducing the meal at home for their families. The district even has a student-run farm stand, where community members can purchase produce from the school garden!

Not all school gardens have herbs or vegetables. At **Nauset Public Schools** in Orleans, MA, 12 fruit trees were planted by students after a gift from a nonprofit organization. Once the fruit trees are ready for harvest, the district plans to serve the fruit as part of their school lunch menu and share it with neighboring districts if there is any excess. In addition to the fruit trees, the district's hydroponic gardens provide students with hands-on nutrition education about growing lettuce and herbs. With a short growing cycle of only 28 days, the students are able to enjoy the greens from their hydroponic garden in the Caesar salad, sandwiches and herb seasonings used in scratch-made dishes.

Watch this [video](#) with photos of school gardens.

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