

Garden at The Ivy School

Portland, Ore.



When educators at The Ivy School in Portland, Ore. realized some students couldn't identify common vegetables in their fresh, whole form, they knew it was time for hands-on growing lessons. "Our goals with the program are to introduce the kids to fresh food and the joy of growing it themselves," said Garden Coordinator Lori Idsinga.

The school's new garden, planted with student help, boasts a small fruit orchard and raised-bed vegetable plots filled this spring with peas, lettuce and chard. This past winter, first through third grade students grew lettuce under grow lights in their classrooms. Many enjoyed the lettuce as an after-school program snack.

Teaching children how to prepare fresh produce in fun, appetizing ways is another aim of the garden program. "We are hoping to challenge the kids to get creative and come up with their own version of recipes," Idsinga explained.



When students prepare a dish themselves and see what goes into it they are "almost always thrilled to try new foods," Idsinga said. "We have already seen the pride in which the kids prepare food and present it to their classmates." The school's winning recipe for Mini Red Pepper Poppers will be featured in an upcoming children's book by Anne Nagro. The book promotes healthy eating by eating what you grow.



On the days when Idsinga isn't holding cooking classes, she leaves open the kitchen door so kids can stop by to taste what's cooking, learn how food is being prepared and add input. She asks if they'd prefer thyme or oregano in their salad dressing. Does the soup need pepper? Would they prefer the soup to be thicker or thinner? Roasted beets or raw broccoli today? Many children wouldn't eat beets until one classmate pointed out how cool red teeth looked, she smiled.

Parents often are surprised by what their children are willing to eat at school. "We are also hoping they will take this knowledge home and introduce it to their families," she said.

The Ivy School's garden is a community effort. Parents have spent hours writing grants, building garden boxes, planting, and cooking with students. The school is a public Montessori charter school for children in first through third grade, and eventually will expand to include students through eighth grade.

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