

Learning Gate Community School

Seed to Soup® Organic Garden Program

I sincerely believe that for the child...it is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow.

Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder

The Learning Gate Community School's organically grown garden offers many unique experiences that are shared by students, teachers and the surrounding community. At Learning Gate, we have taken the idea of a school with a garden and designed an interactive schoolroom within a garden.

Our *Seed to Soup*® Program engages students in a year of gardening that teaches students the life cycle of the organic garden, a living ecosystem that supports the students health and nutrition. The program focuses on the plant's life cycle from seed, to plant, to vegetable fruition, healthy food preparation, consumption of the delicious fruits and veggies and finally using the waste for composting to nourish future seeds. The benefit of increased student and community health through knowledge gained about healthy food choices and organic practices are evident at our school. Teachers use garden activities to inform our students about local and global agriculture practices. This program empowers our community to make sustainable consumption choices.

In the garden, the students explore the solar energy, water, flora, fauna and soil cycles on a daily basis to truly experience a living system. Our

plot of fertile ground is a living ecosystem that functions as a working and ever changing model to be studied by our budding scientists. Our educators are excited to utilize this bountiful experience as they enrich the learning of our students in all curriculum areas. By investigating the many aspects of gardening and agriculture with our garden, our students benefit from knowledge in scientific methodology, math and measurement skills, and appreciation for the balance of nature. The students and teachers enjoy fruits and vegetables that are harvested seasonally.

All grade levels participate in a spiraling curriculum that integrates all subject areas to the hands-on garden classroom. Our students are involved in every stage of the garden plan and as a result develop a personal relationship with nature. We adhere to organic gardening practices to ensure the health of the environment. Healthy, organic, living soil helps our plants thrive! The Learning Gate community has ownership of the garden and respect for the processes of the sun, soil, water, and air as they participate in the many gardening adventures.

Our garden classroom includes the following learning areas:

The Seed to Soup Organic Fruit and Vegetable Garden is a 5,000 square foot plot that enables the production of a variety of vegetables to be grown.



We use companion planting, succession planting, OMRI certified

integrated pest management techniques and heirloom seeds to maintain a vibrant and healthy plot. We enrich the soil with compost, use rain barrels for irrigation, and use worm tea and fish emulsion for natural fertilizers.

Class Maintained Raised Beds In the garden Learning Gate Community School students are encouraged to experiment and play in an aesthetically pleasing, child friendly, garden inspired by literature and hands-on gardening opportunities. Each class maintains a 10 ft X 5 ft raised bed throughout the year. These raised beds are wonderful for the classroom communities to express themselves in creative and unique ways. Classes are encouraged to experiment with themes, designs, and growing methods that interest them.

The Beneficial Insect Garden is a special ecosystem designed to attract beneficial insects to the garden area. These insects are essential for pollination in our garden. Our students hand-pick insects that they identify as 'pests' in our garden plot and relocate them to this special habitat. This garden is a combination of vegetable and herb plants, native plants, and water-wise annuals. This combination ensures proper pollination of our crops each season.

The Compost Yard is designed to educate the Learning Gate Community about the various composting methods available. We have a large manure pile that composts down and is added to the garden as necessary. The three bin composter built by our second graders last year continues to provide space for greens to break down before being turned into the compost pit. There are several compost bins of various size and shape throughout campus to receive all of the compostable materials the

school creates. All compostable material is collected during lunch daily for our compost program. Several classes maintain vermicompost bins and save worm tea to enrich the garden beds. Worms make excellent class pets! These spaces are designed for students to learn the science behind the decomposition and nitrogen cycles. They are able to conduct scientific investigations to test hypothesis within this integrated learning laboratory.

Chickens Learning Gate Community School adopted a small flock of chickens. The middle school students built the coop. The chickens have offered our students opportunities to nurture livestock, learn about the life of chickens, and become aware of issues related to the poultry industry. Chickens teach the students responsibility and life skills. The hay and chicken scat are composted, the eggs are distributed to the student population, and the hens are beloved pets to all the children who attend garden.



Learning Gate Community School's Seed to Soup Organic Garden is a unique feature on our natural and diverse campus. Students at all grade levels encounter a plethora of learning adventures in our garden area while learning about the balance needed in environmental systems. Our students are involved in several community service projects throughout the year. One of the most rewarding projects for our students is the partnership our school made with the Hillsborough County Head Start Preschool Program. Our sixth grade student's host field trips to our garden. They are proud of their garden and want to share it with the

community. They mentor preschool students from around the county in our school garden. The preschool students play their way through the garden with their while their student mentor gains in innumerable ways. Our students have written books to share with the preschoolers during their visit. Our students visit the preschool centers to help plant trees and build gardens for students who might not otherwise have access to learning through gardens.

