

Galesville Elementary: Recipes from the “Food Court”



Jean Wallner has worked in school food service for 18 years, but has never seen students eat more vegetables than she does now. After puzzling over how to keep students from passing up the veggies she served at school, she helped envision the Galesville school garden, and bring it to life. “I thought if I could just get them planting, they might decide to eat better,” she said. Since 2009, the Galesville Garden has turned Wallner’s vision into a reality.

Each year, community volunteers help chop, assemble, and freeze garden vegetables for a ratatouille recipe developed by the Viroqua School District. This product is then used throughout the school year as a base for spaghetti and pizza sauces. Potatoes, squash, and sweet potatoes from the garden are also roasted and served in school lunches. In fall, fresh lettuce, watermelon, muskmelon, peppers, tomatoes and carrots are served regularly on the salad bar. Galesville students always know when a dish has come from the garden, and according to the school’s food service director, tend to eat more vegetables than other schools in the district.

Vegetables make their way into classes as well. “Just this week,” Wallner said, “one of our kindergarten teachers wrote a story with her class about eating a rainbow. When her kids talked about what kinds of foods are red and yellow and green, they were saying real foods like cherry tomatoes, not things like red frosting...and they’ve only been to the garden a few times!”

To help get more students involved in the garden, Wallner started a garden club that meets after school twice a month during the growing season, with extra sessions in spring. Before long, students in the club wanted more and more of the garden. “When is garden club going to be?” they would ask, eager to plant, harvest, and taste.

“So we started doing some garden recipes and cooking with the kids,” Wallner said. Garden club has students cooking in winter, summer, and on rainy days. Their



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recipes have included fresh salsas, cornbread from corn grown in the garden, veggie pizza, and even a demonstration by a local restaurant owner. After testing plenty of recipes, students helped create a seasonal cooking calendar that they dubbed “Recipes from the Food Court,” in reference to their garden’s location on top of the school’s old tennis courts. The calendar, which also features garden photos taken by students, are on sale for \$5 each to help raise funds for the garden.

During Galesville’s August summer school session, art classes use the garden as a place to look for inspiration for drawing, painting, and photography. Much of the artwork is created outside, and students have also made tiles to be displayed in the garden. Art in the garden lessons include harvest time as well, and students go home with bags of produce.

This year, Galesville hopes to run summer garden camps in June and July to help keep kids involved during the rest of the growing season. The camps would run three mornings per week, and would use curriculum from Got Dirt? Garden Toolkit and Got Veggies? Nutrition Education Curriculum as well as USDA standards-based garden curriculum materials, including the Great Garden Detective Adventure and Dig In!

Between planting, cooking, and eating fresh foods, the Galesville Garden has had a positive impact on everyone who participates – which includes parents, grandparents, and community volunteers in addition to students. “I feel rewarded at the end of each garden club meeting; everyone has worked hard, all are enthused about working together, and all are excited to come back again” Wallner said. “I really am most grateful to the grandmothers, mothers and our young art teacher, Angie Lavery, who have helped throughout the year as our enthusiastic club has grown in size.”

We wish Galesville the best as they continue to improve student nutrition, knowledge, and engagement with vegetables and recipes from the Food Court!



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