

# AN EDIBLE CURRICULUM

Granny's Garden School in Ohio teaches students gardening can be enjoyable and vegetables can be tasty.

By Abby Kleckler



**G**etting most kids to eat their fruits and vegetables is a Herculean task. The issue is rarely that they don't like the taste and frequently that they won't even try the food.

Research shows garden-based education increases fruit and vegetable intake, so how can we get children to unplug and get out of the house?

Roberta Paolo has been digging up a solution since 2002 when she launched Granny's Garden School.

The nonprofit organization teaches 1,600 first-through fourth-grade students annually at three Loveland, Ohio, schools.

"The reason I first started the garden program was because I saw the impact gardening with me had on my grandkids and wanted to give other kids the chance to pick flowers," Paolo says. "Then we quickly started including vegetables, and now we're one of the largest and most comprehensive school garden programs in the country."

Among the three schools, Paolo and her team have 124 3-by-10-foot vegetable gardens, lots of flower gardens and three nature trails. The program recently expanded to Cincinnati's Stewart Elementary School, which added an additional 400 students and a feasible model for future growth.

### The Systematic Strategy

Granny's Garden School relies on donations, grants and fundraisers to bring gardening education into the curriculum without costing the school district.

The staff includes garden educators who are paired up with teachers and their students for the year. These garden educators are at the schools every week in the spring and fall with set lesson plans.

"When students are outside, the garden educator is the lead educator. The teacher is with the class and participating but is in the support role," Paolo says. "That is why we have 100

percent participation; the teachers don't have the time to do everything."

The garden educators go through training on a regular basis – every two weeks – and all their lesson plans are in line with state standards and the curriculum.

### Plant with Purpose

The students plant a wide range of edibles in the gardens from carrots and cucumbers to potatoes and beets.

"The goal of the first time out is what we call 'planting a salad,'" Paolo says. "The kids participate in harvesting whatever is out there for the salad, they clean it, and then they eat it and talk about it, all outside."

The garden educators each have a wagon with their supplies – a cutting board, knives and wipes included – so eager students can get right to trying anything harvestable.

Students are encouraged to sample everything without salad dressing, so they know the real

## A RETAIL COMMUNITY

Granny's Garden School has found support throughout the community, notably from local growers and garden centers.

"Our growers and retailers know that we are sending customers to their stores today, while growing their next crop of customers in our gardens," says Roberta Paolo, Granny's Garden School founder and executive director.

Al Krismer Plant Farm, in Cincinnati, Ohio, has been working with the program since 2008. It supplies some of the annuals, perennials, vegetable plants and signage for Granny's Annual Plant Sale, which takes place the first weekend in May.

For the sale, five local growers and retailers provide plants on consignment, meaning they are also willing to take back whatever does not sell.

For Al Krismer, there are several reasons why the program is worth supporting, the first of which is that it encourages students to eat more nutritious foods such as kale, kohlrabies and fresh leaf lettuce that they may have never encountered before.

"Parents become aware of different food choices as well, and students may encourage their parents to go and buy seeds or vegetables for a home garden," he says, "Which in turn may make the parents customers of a local garden center and increase the sales of vegetable plants and garden supplies that go with them."

Krismer is also on the plant committee for the annual sale and offers information about what to grow and how to grow it throughout the year to make the educational component as beneficial as possible.

"Students learn best by applying the theory they learn in the classroom to real-life situations in the garden," Krismer says. "As a retired educator who taught for 30 years, 10 of which were as a vocational horticulture instructor, I see the value of such an approach."

taste of the vegetables.

Embracing the trend of small fruits and vegetables has made perfect sense for the program.

"Those like mini bells are great because instead of one bell pepper for a kid to pick, you get six," Paolo says. "And when you have 30 kids and three garden beds that are 3-by-10 [feet], you have to plan in order to have something for everyone to pick."

### Beyond the School

Paolo says one of her favorite stories is when a mother called and said, "My daughter tasted beets for the first time at school today, and I'm calling to find out how you prepared them." It turns out they were raw.

Granny's Garden School surveys the fourth-grade students before they leave the program, and it found approximately 60 percent have started gardens at their homes. More than that say they go to the garden center with their parents.

"They're interested in flowers and vegetables, and they have a preference" Paolo says. "They ask their parents to buy a plant for them, and they're guiding the parents on what's being bought at the grocery store."

Proceeds from the Granny's Garden School Annual Plant Sale (see sidebar) go to the Schoolyard Nature Garden Program, which aims to provide financial, in-kind and training resources to sustain other garden programs.

One set of Paolo's grandchildren now lives in California, which adds a new perspective.

"We're about to launch something called Granny's Kids Garden Club," Paolo says. "We can't go out there and start school garden programs across the country, so what we're trying to do is to take some pieces of it and bring it home to the kids."

Some of these pieces include monthly projects and easy ideas for parents to do with their children.

Everything centers on the key to the granny way of doing things, according to Paolo: "Keep it simple." **LGR**

# Bringing the Farmers Market to the Home Garden

High-Performing. Easy-to-Grow.



For more information, please visit  
[www.SyngentaGardenVegetablesUS.com](http://www.SyngentaGardenVegetablesUS.com)  
or call (800) 549-0158.

syngenta flowers

All photos are the property of Syngenta unless otherwise noted.  
©2015 Syngenta. **Important: Always read and follow all bag tag and label instructions before buying or using Syngenta products. The instructions contain important conditions of sale, including limitations of warranty and remedy.** NOTE: Photo(s) represent a variety; actual appearance may vary. Some or all of the varieties listed herein may be protected under one or more of the following: Plant Variety Protection, United States Plant Patents, Utility Patents, and/or Plant Breeders' Rights and may not be propagated or reproduced without authorization. The Syngenta logo is a trademark of a Syngenta Group Company.

Write in 807