

## If They Grow It, They'll Eat It!

*By Catherine Sherlock – WildBC Facilitator and Communications and Sustainability Consultant, [sherlockink.com](http://sherlockink.com)*

Creating a school garden transforms your schoolyard into a hands-on, outdoor learning space. Students experience excitement, anticipation and a sense of accomplishment from planting seeds, watching plants grow and ripen and harvesting. And a garden sets the stage for all kinds of conversation and skill building around food choices on personal, social and environmental levels.

Although food is vital to our survival and quality of life, our food knowledge is at an all-time low.

### Kids (and Adults) Don't Know Origins of Basic Foods

Many children think foods come from supermarkets or trucks or simply have never thought about where their food comes from:

- The chef, Jamie Oliver, visited a classroom of 6-year-olds in West Virginia and found that students couldn't identify basic produce like tomatoes cauliflower, potatoes, mushrooms
- A survey of 1,600 Australian children between the ages of six and seventeen years found that 92% didn't know bananas grew on plants and 41% couldn't identify a zucchini. (<http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/food/new-research-reveals-many-australian-children-dont-know-where-fruit-and-vegetables-come-from/story-fneuz8wn-1226926874599>)

Most children (and loads of adults) don't recognize the link between eating healthy food and having the energy to run and play and the focus to think straight.

There's also little understanding of the relationship between food health and land health.

Our diets are high in processed and other unhealthy foods – and we're reaping poor personal and environmental health as a result. We're seeing an alarming rise of nutrition-related health conditions such as diabetes and obesity. In fact, today's children are the first generation predicted to live a shorter lifespan than their parents. We've also seeing significant environmental problems, such as the loss of topsoil, that could impact many generations.



*The Pizza Garden – a different crop was planted in each 'slice'.*

### Benefits of School Garden Learning

- Results in children making better food choices such as eating more fruits and vegetables [1,2,3,4,5]
- Boosts social skills, better behavior and self-esteem [8,9]
- Integrates multiple subject areas [6]
- Improves overall academic achievement [6,7]
- Provides knowledge of agriculture and the environment [6,7]



Simply learning the importance of good nutrition isn't enough – children need help developing skills that enable them to make good choices. One secret that has been discovered by people who garden with kids (and backed up by research): if they grow it, they'll eat it! Children who garden show improved food choices. And the benefits don't end there. Getting your hands in the dirt and experiencing the magic of tiny plants breaking through the soil are lessons not soon forgotten. Research is showing that gardening with children can improve their social skills.

As well, school gardens are both living classrooms and outdoor laboratories that easily teach everything from science, mathematics, languages to fine arts. Students who garden gain an in-depth knowledge of what we're growing on the land and putting into our bodies – preparing them to make both good personal and community decisions.

### The Pizza Project

Julie Johnston is the Resource Teacher for the Spring Leaves Family Learning program at Pender Island School and has extensive experience in outdoor learning. When she first started at the school, she asked her students to divide a paper into four squares and draw or write something that they loved or wanted to learn in each square.

One of the kids said, "I love pizza!" Three other kids said, "I love pizza, I love pizza, I love pizza!"

So that became the pizza project. They grew red fife wheat on a plot of land along with some vegetables and the next year they made pizza from scratch.

From there, projects have grown as new needs came up. The following year they built a school vegetable garden. Other projects have included a compost, a greenhouse, a cob garden shed and an outdoor classroom with a living roof.

### Julie's 11 Fun and Easy Vegetables to Plant in A School Garden

1. **sugar snap peas**, great for planting along garden fences early in the growing season
2. **lettuce, spinach, and other leafy greens**, with new seeds planted every two weeks for continued harvest (another early season one). Kale will grow in winter and make yummy kale chips
3. **radishes** grow quickly and are ready to eat in a month (plant early in the season and they won't get too spicy)
4. **carrots** grow quickly, too, though the seeds are quite tiny and hard to handle (try carrot seed tape)
5. **potatoes**, planted early, could be ready for harvest before the summer break (just cut seed potatoes with an eye in each piece and bury)



### Julie's "So Easy" Pizza Dough Recipe

Julie used this recipe to make pizza from scratch with 107 students one morning (however, she doesn't suggest doing that):

*2 cups of flour*

*1 tsp salt*

*2 tsp baking powder*

*2/3 cup water*

**Directions:** *Mix and knead on floured counter for 2 minutes. Spread out on pizza pan, then brush on some cooking oil. Top with tomato sauce and any other toppings.*



6. **green beans**, bush or pole, are great raw or cooked
7. **cherry tomatoes and tomatillos** are fun for kids — make some salsa together (Shhhh, secret tip for school and community gardens: to discourage two-legged garden marauders, choose a tomato variety that is orange when ripe; fewer uninvited visitors will take them, thinking they're not yet ripe.)
8. **pumpkins** take more space and won't be ready until fall, but are perfect for teaching patience
9. **broccoli** is not known as a favourite of children — until they've grown their own (buy starter plants to speed this one up)
10. **sunflowers**—okay, not a vegetable, but in the fall, your students can dry and eat the seeds, or leave the flower heads in the garden as a treat for birds
11. **Asian greens**, such as bok choy, because they germinate and grow so rapidly in cooler weather

---

### ***Want An Easier Option?***

*Julie suggests, "You can get started simply and quickly, by using window boxes or sunny window sills or by setting up a container garden in schoolyard."*

---

## **References**

1. Morris, J.L. and S. Zidenberg-Cherr. (2002). "Garden-enhanced nutrition curriculum improves fourth-grade school children's knowledge of nutrition and preferences for some vegetables." J Am Diet Assoc. 102(1): p. 91-93.
2. McAleese, J.D. and L.L. Rankin. (2007). "Garden-based nutrition education affects fruit and vegetable consumption in sixth-grade adolescents." J Am Diet Assoc. 107(4): p. 662-665.
3. Graham, H. and S. Zidenberg-Cherr. (2005). "California teachers perceive school gardens as an effective nutritional tool to promote healthful eating habits." J Am Diet Assoc.
4. Davis JN, Ventura EE, Cook LT, Gyllenhammer LE, Gatto NM. (2011). "LA Sprouts: a gardening, nutrition, and cooking intervention for Latino youth improves diet and reduces obesity." J Am Diet Assoc. 111(8):1224-30.
5. Heim, Stephanie, Jamie Stang and Marjorie Ireland. (2009). "A Garden Pilot Project Enhances Fruit and Vegetable Consumption among Children." Volume 109, Issue 7, 1220–1226
6. Lieberman, G.A., and L. Hoody. (1998). "Closing the achievement gap: using the environment as an integrating context for learning." Sacramento, CA: CA State Education and Environment Roundtable.
7. Dirks, A.E. and K. Orvis. (2005). "An evaluation of the Junior Master Gardener Program in third grade classrooms. Hort Technology." 4 (1) 77-80.
8. Waliczek, T.M. (2001). "The effect of school gardens on children's interpersonal relationships and attitudes toward school." Hort Technology. 11(3): 466-468.
9. Robinson, C.W., and J. M. Zajicek. 2005. Growing minds: the effects of a one-year school garden program on six constructs of life skills of elementary school children. Hort Technology 15(3):453-457

