



Garden Case Study

Young Sprouts Giving Garden

At William E. Young School in the Homer Community Consolidated School District 33C, a garden started in 2015 by their county's We WILL Grow program had been neglected. One passionate parent took the lead and revitalized the school garden in 2017 to create a hands-on learning opportunity for students.

Over 50 children signed up for the Young Sprouts Garden Club led by Misty Soderholm, and other students worked with her during their recess. The first step was to clean up the garden that had not been touched in over a year. Garden beds were cleaned out, fresh organic mushroom soil and compost from her home were applied, and new mulch was spread. The students' favorite part? Pulling all the weeds! For an artistic component, they created bright pops of color by painting the beds and adding positive words like "love", "hope", and "brave". They also constructed a spiral herb tower with bricks and painted stones.

Grades involved:
PreK - 4

Enrollment:
50+ students in garden club

F&R: NA

Year started: 2017

Garden type(s):
fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, organic

Garden use:
after school, recess, and summer programs, education, donation

Critical players:
parent leader, Young Sprouts Garden club., Will County, Young School PTO

Education connections:
composting, vermiculture, recycling, plant cycle

Community connections:
garden produce supports local food pantry

Funding sources:
Young School PTO, Will County, individual funds



Next, Soderholm consulted with a Master Gardener friend to best plan what would grow well together and what should be started from seed. The club initially used tools from her home, but later received funding from the PTO and Will County Garden Program for gloves, shovels, a storage cabinet, and more. In addition to flowers planted throughout the garden, they planted chamomile, mint, sage, thyme, stevia, and lavender in the herb tower. The garden beds were filled with strawberries, cucumbers, kale, lettuce, cabbage, okra, hot and bell peppers, beans, squash, tomatoes, eggplant, cantelope, and watermelon - and it's all organic!

The garden club meets weekly from March to June, and Soderholm holds summer work days for students and families to help with maintenance and harvesting. Their last harvest went through September, and they donated over 150 pounds to the Lockport Food Pantry nearby. Many educational components were attached, including lessons on plant parts and life cycle, composting, and recycling. Some teachers extended the education by growing plants in classrooms. Joan O'Keefe, an environmental educator from Will County, met with the garden club and provided worms that the students released into garden beds. The county awarded Young School the 2017/18 Earth Award, and Soderholm shared their success at a regional conference, GreenTown Will County.

Not only have the students benefited, but many parents have expressed gratitude and were excited to plant seeds, play with worms, and eat fresh veggies with their children at home. Soderholm admits struggling to get ample volunteer support to manage the club. With so many children interested, she's considering limiting the number of students or making it a paid club. She hopes to have more involvement next year as the garden's success is noticed. Soderholm's advice is to keep the students active. Lectures weren't as effective, but digging in the dirt and being creative has held their interest well and taught them many things. The mission of the garden is best summed up on the Young Sprouts Garden Club t-shirts: **"If you want a child's mind to grow, you must first plant the seed."**

