

FEATURE STORY:

Little Green Thumbs & Little Green Sprouts

Little Green Thumbs and Little Green Sprouts School Gardening Programs, Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan

Little Green Thumbs and Little Green Sprouts are garden-based education programs put on by Agriculture in the Classroom that invite teachers to use their indoor gardens as a springboard for investigative, student-centered learning. Little Green Thumbs is an indoor classroom gardening program for upper elementary students, which creates dynamic learning opportunities by supporting teachers and students to grow food in their classrooms. Little Green Sprouts is a smaller version of the program, designed for younger students. Little Green Sprouts focuses on growing micro-greens, lettuce and herbs while offering ample learning opportunities for young students. Both programs offer students the opportunity to **plant** a garden; **grow** their understanding of the relationship between food, themselves, their community, and the environment; **eat** their harvest; and **share** the surplus with those around them.

The Little Green Thumbs and Little Green Sprouts indoor gardening programs provide a platform for elementary students of all learning abilities and types to engage in the hands-on experience of growing food. Although these programs are designed specifically for elementary students, the impact reaches much further. **“One of the mandates of the Little Green Thumbs program is ‘sharing the gift,’ where teachers and students pass on their learning experiences to their families, members of their school and their local communities,”** shared Chandra Gusikoski, Communications Coordinator of Agriculture in the Classroom. **“Classrooms have shared the gift by sharing seeds and garden produce, sharing vermi-compost and red wiggler worms, inviting other classrooms to celebration events, and sharing knowledge and skills with other students and family members.”**

Gardens are living laboratories that help inspire students to wonder, question, experiment and construct their understanding of the world around them. **“Gardens are excellent teaching tools for building STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) understanding, while fostering the skills needed to thrive in an evolving society and workplace, such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. And it is important for students to know where their food comes from! By being directly responsible for growing and harvesting food, students have a better understanding, appreciation, and respect for the food they eat,”** Gusikoski expressed.

After a full season of growing, teachers and students are ready to celebrate their challenges and successes! **“A garden celebration generally involves the preparation of a meal featuring garden produce, such as salad, pizza, or pasta,”** highlighted Gusikoski. **“Students often invite additional classrooms, school staff, and their own families to join in the celebration as special guests.”** These events offer a unique opportunity for students to prepare and serve a meal, while creating a platform to share their knowledge and experiences with their peers.

The benefits realized through the hands-on nature of school gardening are immense. As a classroom project, gardens encourage students to try new things, take ownership, and collaborate with one another. Student’s involvement in gardening activities has shown a remarkable improvement in the understanding of and attitudes towards healthy eating, environmental stewardship, food and agriculture production, and reducing food waste.



Erin Richard's Grade 3/4 student's Little Green Thumbs garden and pasta party.