

# Tucson Schools Serve Bounty from Gardens

Story by Emily Huddleston

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If you drive by schools in Tucson, you are likely to spot vegetable gardens.

The idea of teaching students through gardening has flourished in the last few years. Now a new movement, known as Garden to Cafeteria is starting to bear fruit. And vegetables.

Schools with gardens can get them certified as a safe source of food and can then serve any produce that is harvested from the garden in the cafeteria.

Michelle Welsh, nutrition program coordinator for the Tucson Unified School District's food services department, said the process began about a year ago and has been developing ever since.



Molly Reed, an outdoor learning teacher, walks through Borton Primary Magnet School's garden.

PHOTO: Emily Huddleston, AZPM



Borton Primary Magnet School has had a garden for six years and in January it was certified to serve the food from its garden.

PHOTO: Emily Huddleston, AZPM

bottom. We made it fun and interactive so the kids actually had to shake that salad to incorporate the dressing.”

Borton Primary Magnet School has had a garden for six years, and in January it was certified to serve the food from its garden.

From planting to harvesting and preparing, the students are involved every step at Borton. The school has taste tests with the students to see how the kids react to the new dishes and the feedback helps refine the meals.

Carina Zehr, is part of a yearlong service program called FoodCorps and the Farm-to-Child program at the Community Food Bank. She was placed at Borton in September to help with the garden. Zehr said at the tasting

“Our goal then was to put all of these policies and procedures in place for our district so that all the schools would know what to do if they had a garden,” Welsh said. “To make sure it was being done properly and safe and in compliance with our guidelines and procedures.”

Welsh said TUSD schools are growing what she called some exciting foods.

“Some of the things that have been growing are Swiss chard, different kinds of lettuce, kale, kumquats, strawberries,” she said. “For one school, Manzo, we made a shaker salad, so it had things like greens and fruit and then we have dressing on the



Kids at Borton Primary Magnet School help plant, care for and harvest from the garden.

PHOTO: Emily Huddleston, AZPM

<https://www.azpm.org/p/home-featured/2015/4/29/62531-tucson-schools-serve-bounty-from-their-gardens>



Students taste test new fruits and veggies before they are served in the cafeteria.

PHOTO: Emily Huddleston, AZPM

Borton and she said this is not only impacting the students at school but it is helping them at home too.

*“I have parents coming to me after these events and saying my child came home and they said they had this amazing dish,” said Reed. “I need the recipe because they have never eaten beets before and now they are saying they are eating them at school.”*

There are safety issues involved when kids are harvesting food to serve to their peers, but Zehr said it is important to consider the health benefits.

“Yes there are risks in using garden produce, but on the other hand it is helping kids take one more step towards living healthier lives,” said Zehr.

She said this also helps expose the kids to new perspectives.

“I also think that when you are thinking about health issues you can see how serving garden produce, focuses on the other side of the health issue problem,” said Zehr. “Kids who aren’t getting enough to eat and kids who aren’t getting enough nutrients in their food to be healthy.”

Manzo, John B Wright and Mission View are the other schools in TUSD that are certified to serve food from their gardens in the cafeteria.



Artichokes are one of more than 10 varieties of plants growing in the garden.

PHOTO: Emily Huddleston, AZPM

events the school has a board with tried it, liked it and loved it categories. Students can place stickers based on how they feel about the dishes. She said it is great because there isn’t a negative category. The kids are always celebrated for trying new foods.

“Over time, the more kids are able to taste new foods, even if they don’t like it, the first time will make a significant difference in the future of whether they will recognize it at the grocery store when they are old enough to buy it for themselves or whether they will be willing to try it again,” said Zehr.

Molly Reed is the outdoor learning teacher at



Pumpkin and Snowflake, also called Anna and Elsa, are the garden chickens.

PHOTO: Emily Huddleston, AZPM

### What's growing in Borton's garden?

- Yellow squash
- Zucchini
- Amaranth
- Eggplant
- Okra
- Flowers
- Artichokes
- Beans
- Watermelon
- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers