

SUMMER OF GROWTH

Youth Participant Report on the Summer Garden Work Experience Program

SD 62 campus gardens provide a unique learning space for students and grow a variety of produce for the schools to use. This summer, the gardens at Royal Bay and Edward Milne were maintained by a group of students in the Garden Work Experience Program, run by the EMCS Society. The Program allows students to earn graduation credits in an engaging outdoor environment while learning valuable skills and growing their knowledge about small-scale food production.



Projects and Accomplishments:

- Developed rainwater catchment system at EMCS garden
- Expanded garden beds at Royal Bay Garden
- Planted large volume of plant starts for district gardens
- Ran a weekly farmstand to sell our produce

IMPACT

Through conversation and reflection, work experience students identified the value they gained from the Program.

Gardening Skills:

- Seed planting and harvesting
- Foodsafe produce handling
- Mixing potting soil
- Identifying weeds
- Irrigation repair

Interpersonal Skills:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Customer interaction

Wellbeing:

- Physical activity/exercise
- Time spent outdoors
- Opportunity to learn about and eat fresh produce
- Safe and inclusive environment

New Perspectives:

From community guest-speakers participants learned about:

- The role of gardens in schools
- Composting - Why and how
- Urban Agriculture and food security
- Seed harvesting

Participants gained a practical skill set combined with a variety of perspectives on the impact and role of local garden/farm spaces. They are more confident in their ability to grow food and some started their own gardens at home!



HIGHLIGHTS

The participants' favourite memories of the program :

Growing the weekly farm stand from scratch

Getting to take home fresh food



Working on projects outside

Harvesting fresh produce

Meeting new peers and learning to work with each other



Field trip to Metchosin Farm

CONTINUE TO GROW

Ideas for the Future

How can we improve the program?

- **Planned and structured programming.** This might look like having a daily schedule and task list, or weekly themes and learning topics.
- **More participants.** There were days we could have used a few more helping hands. Advertising the program in schools well before summer could gather more interest.
- **Structure to differentiate garden assistant position from work experience.** Having a timeline of tasks to complete over the summer would help.
- **Less gravel, more soil.** The way the Royal Bay "garden" was built prohibited meaningful youth engagement in new garden building.

How can we get more youth engaged in school gardens?

- Post garden happenings in the school. For example, a little poster or board that outlines what's going on in the garden/current projects. Invite students to come out at lunch and help out or just check it out (like drop in gardening).
- Host small open events in the garden (fun activities like apple pressing or potato harvesting)
- Offer free food or offer exchange - come help and take food home.
- Give garden regular presence in school media, for example weekly announcements or newsletter. Include pictures and what is happening in the garden. If youth are seeing the story line or progression that happens through the seasons they may feel more connected to it.
- Host presentations about food security. This is something students learn about in Food Studies and Sustainability courses but it's a current issue that is relevant to everyone. Have a community speaker come to the school and talk about the issue with a premise that anyone can grow food and the school garden is a great place to learn.
- Having a person that isn't a teacher dedicated to garden programming helps to make the garden more accessible and established. I find that the garden at EMCS doesn't always feel approachable because it's often vacant and the only way to get in is to take a food studies class.

