

Tending To Minds And Gardens Alike

BY ADRIAN ESCHENWALD

“We take care of the Earth, and it takes care of us,” said Grace Julian, co-founder of The Edible Classroom, an organization that seeks to bring the world of gardening into classrooms across the county. “We focus on the goodness of our engagement with the Earth.”

The Edible Classroom has a three-pronged mission: to cultivate academic achievement, healthy lifestyles and environmental stewardship, which it accomplishes in a variety of ways with the garden as its backdrop. The organization partners with schools to provide lessons during the school day, resources for teachers and students and after-school programs, and currently it works with 15 schools in Lancaster County.

In the spring, summer, and fall seasons, The Edible Classroom offers schools 40-minute curriculum-based lessons, where students are able to get their hands on the process of growing and harvesting produce directly. If a school has an existing garden, students can immediately begin planting, tending, and harvesting crops, with the goal of enjoying the fruits of their labor and learning along the way. “We come into schools as a partner organization to do whatever they determine,” said Julian. “This can include many different things depending on the school.”

Beginning in March, students start preparing the soil and planting the crops, which they maintain through the end of the school year in May. By the beginning of summer, most crops are ready for students to harvest and eat. Over the summer season, the organization offers programs for students to continue their work as gardeners.

In the fall, The Edible Classroom begins a 10-week period alongside the start of the school year, where students can enjoy the many types of produce that thrive until the beginning of November. During the winter months, the organization takes a break from its regular education programs to develop



If a school does not already have a garden, the organization will assist in establishing one.

new curricula, which change yearly. The basic principles of each curriculum remain the same, but each one has a different focus and plant material.

Beth Horst and Julian planted the seeds for The Edible Classroom several years ago, after they created gardens at their kids' respective elementary schools. “We saw the benefit in the community of having an on-site field trip that the whole school could visit. As parent volunteers, we realized we didn't want to keep it at only two schools,” said Julian. The Edible Classroom bloomed in 2017, when it was incorporated as a nonprofit organization.

As Horst and Julian developed the nonprofit and partnered with more schools, they realized the benefit of not only serving elementary students during the school day but offering opportunities for students of all ages across different school districts. Volunteer opportunities, learning experiences for agriculture and science students and projects such as constructing garden beds and facilities are some of the ways students can become involved with The Edible Classroom.

For more information, visit <https://theedibleclassroom.org/>.



Children examine worms they found in the garden.