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**William Hatch Elementary Celebrates third anniversary of Hatch Patch Organic Garden**

By: JoannaSkubish  
 05/22/09 05:26 PM 53 hits



Second graders Kiana Kelly and Chloe Relf help with plantings in the Hatch Patch organic garden

William Hatch Elementary School in Oak Park is celebrating the third year of an innovative new classroom that is filled with dirt, bugs and lessons that will last a lifetime. The Hatch Patch organic garden serves as a living, growing classroom – teachers at all grade levels tie classroom activities to activities in the garden. On May 18 and 19, students planted this season's garden, which will produce herbs, grains, fruits, vegetables and edible flowers.

Every child in the school has been involved in planting, watering, weeding, tasting or harvesting. "This year, we have added a number of new plants to the garden, "said Hatch Patch Coordinator Cathi Knickrehm. "One of our third graders asked for parsnips, so we are definitely going to plant

parsnips!" Principal Sheila Carter and Golden Apple Award winning Physical Education teacher Sandy Noel have supported this project, and Hatch teachers have helped in the garden. This summer, Hatch Elementary School families will sign up for regular shifts to care for the garden. Funding for the garden is provided by the Hatch PTO.

The Hatch Patch has created a wide variety of learning experiences for the students. Kindergartners have harvested wheat, separated the wheat berries from the chaff, ground the wheat into flour and baked whole wheat muffins for their snack. Fourth graders shucked popcorn and conducted science experiments to test the effect of moisture on popping time, yield and taste. Students then wrote articles about their experiments for the school newsletter. Students found young Black Swallowtail caterpillars in the Hatch Patch herb garden, cared for them in the classroom using the herbs for food, observed them making their chrysalises and watched them emerge as butterflies.

The effects of the Hatch Patch organic garden have a reach well beyond the walls of Hatch Elementary School. "We were proud to be able to donate forty pounds of fresh produce from last summer's harvest to the Oak Park Food Pantry," said Knickrehm. In addition, students, family members and staff enjoyed a sit-down dinner at the fall Hatch Patch Harvest Festival, which featured vegetables and herbs grown in the Hatch Patch. The food was prepared and served by Chef Charles Vales of Winberie's Restaurant.

The Hatch Patch organic garden project is run by a group of parent volunteers. Parents Laurie Freivogel and Laura Constans created a mosaic sign for the garden, and Constans designed and painted a mural on nearby fencing. Growing Power also provides ongoing support for the Hatch Patch through gardening assistance and technical expertise. Growing Power is a national nonprofit organization and land trust supporting people from diverse backgrounds, and the environments in which they live, by helping to provide equal access to healthy, high-quality, safe and affordable food for people in all communities.

The Hatch Patch is one of a number of green initiatives in the school to incorporate hands-on learning experiences with ongoing connections to curriculum. For more information about the Hatch Patch, contact William Hatch Elementary School at (708)524-3095.

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